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# A Meta-analysis of Adolescent Rampage Shootings and the Potential Interconnectivity to Gifted/Talented Children with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders

Meghan M. Salyers

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A META-ANALYSIS OF ADOLESCENT RAMPAGE SHOOTINGS  
AND THE POTENTIAL INTERCONNECTIVITY TO GIFTED/TALENTED  
CHILDREN WITH EMOTIONAL/BEHAVIORAL DISORDERS

By

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A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

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This dissertation meets the standards for appearance, conforms to the style and format requirements of the Graduate School of the University of North Dakota, and is hereby approved.

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## ABSTRACT

On the tenth anniversary of a series of school rampage shootings in Springfield, Oregon, Littleton, Colorado, and Conyers, Georgia, the purpose of this study was to determine whether there were indications of intellectual, academic, or creative giftedness with emotional/behavioral disorders in the perpetrators. In addition, through historiographical methods, this study was designed to allow for themes to surface from the authentic writings of the adolescent shooters.

Similarities in previous research results are reported in the meta-analysis, and categories derived from my analysis of the writings of Kip Kinkel, Eric Harris, Dylan Klebold, and T.J. Solomon are indicated in the analysis chapter. These categories are: (1) existential thinking, (2) control/power, (3) image, (4) blame, (5) cognitive/affective thinking problems, (6) lacking meaningful connections, (7) meaningful connections, (8) creativity, and (9) intellectualization.

In addition, two themes surfaced in this study. They are: (1) The desires of the boys to improve their image may have been their motivation to take control of the negative circumstances in which they perceived themselves to be; and (2) The perpetrators felt devalued for their natural proclivities for creative and/or intellectual strengths, which may have caused them to question existentially why they were here, and to blame a higher power for their burdens.

Finally, the themes evolved into one assertion. The aforementioned themes may have contributed to self-doubt of their value in the world; hence, contributions toward a diminished level of social-emotional self-efficacy may have deepened, which in turn, may have stimulated their need for gaining power and control to improve their image according to their perceptions and the perceptions of their peers.

The implications of this study are discussed, along with several recommendations for future studies and programming for G/T children and for children with E/BD's. Finally, I share recommendations for those involved with the criminal aspects of these and future cases.

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION TO THE DISSERTATION

### Introduction

Approximately ten years ago, a wave of brutal school shootings occurred: Jonesboro, Arkansas; Littleton, Colorado; Springfield, Oregon; West Paducah, Kentucky; and Conyers, Georgia. Many investigators (NRCIMNA, 2003; Newman et al, 2004; Urso Spina, 2000; Webber, 2003) delved into the social impact of bullying, peer pressure, family histories, socioeconomics, and the community status of the perpetrators as possible causes for the rampage shootings. The following study was fueled by strong interests in school violence and bullying, and their effects on students' self-esteem, along with a passion for promoting better practices for gifted and talented education. The combined passions aided in creating the question of how, if at all, the two areas could be related. I wondered if there was another facet to the quandary of rampage shootings that perhaps had been overlooked by many: the perpetrators' intellectual and creative strengths.

The quandary spoken of had many facets to consider, such as the shooters' hidden personalities and passions, the socioeconomic status of their towns, and the histories associated with their schools for being "typical" middle and high schools. Given the enormity and disastrous consequences of the shooters' actions, the situations they created were anything but typical. In fact, Glenn Muschert (2002) suggested that the events of

rampage shootings were given too much attention; that media and the abundance of people discussing the events have created a new “reality” which was really a distortion of the actual happenings. In this light, it may not be difficult to overlook such things as the shooters’ strengths.

Upon initial glance into the field of gifted and talented (G/T) education, one could view it as a field that needed no particular attention. On the other hand, commonly *perceived* as the opposite end of the spectrum, the education for those who have qualified for special education services for emotional/behavioral disorders (E/BDs) has received much attention; most agreed that these children have unique needs in the academic setting for which accommodations should be made. However, when the field of G/T education was placed under the microscope, several gaps surfaced in teacher training, funding, identification practices, and national definition that, in turn, may have a negative impact on students’ emotional and behavioral functions. This was the essence of Bandura’s (1994, 1986) self-efficacy theory, that how things are perceived by an individual affected the outcomes of an individual’s emotions, and the subsequent behaviors (Pajares, 2002).

As we approach the tenth anniversary of several rampage shootings in schools across the nation, this study explored the character commonalities within four of the adolescent students who committed the shootings in Littleton, Conyers, and Springfield, and the potential connections with students who have been dually diagnosed as gifted/talented (G/T) with emotional/behavioral disorders (E/BDs). The literature review includes a meta-analysis of the available literature, and illuminates the unique social-



emotional issues of the gifted/talented which include perceptual distortions as outlined in Cognitive Theory, misdiagnosis issues due to overlap of symptoms and characteristics between certain E/BDs and G/T, and the potential impact on the lives of the shooters.

Bearing these thoughts in mind, the questions for the study were: (1) What common academic, behavioral, and emotional patterns emerge among the rampage shooters leading up to, and through their rampages; and (2) How do the patterns of behaviors and personalities of the rampage shooters compare to those associated with students who are gifted/talented with displayed symptoms of emotional/behavioral disorders? These questions led to an in-depth study of personal writings and videotapes of the shooters, reputable news reports and documentaries, and reports from police, psychologists, and attorneys involved in the cases.

#### Need for the Study

Several studies (Newman et al, 2004; NRCIMNA, 2003; Urso Spina, 2000, Webber, 2003) were conducted on rampage shootings; however, none has investigated the relationships to G/T and E/BD education. Moreover, the investigations were not conducted from an educator's perspective. This is not to discredit the investigations previously conducted; in fact, the studies have been detailed and comprehensive and have contributed greatly to the understanding of a complex and perplexing series of events. However, to truly understand why these students selectively chose to conduct the violent actions on school grounds (or during a school-related event), I believed it was essential to view the shootings from the perspective of an educator.

Additionally, most research conducted on gifted and talented students indicated the importance of their education for a society burdened with complex problems, yet many still view G/T education as optional. Several in authority over education at the local, state, and national levels have claimed it to be economically irresponsible to implement programming for such a small percentage of the academic population. In response to this, I pose the following question: What is the impact of a decision such as this? The school rampage shooters may be few, but the impact of their violent actions on the schools' population, the perpetrators' families, their communities, the individual states, and the nation was vast. As Sylvia Rimm wrote in the collection of articles condensed and edited by Neihart et al (2002), "If knowledgeable adults are not available to support these gifted students in their schools, they are indeed at risk of using their gifted cognitive abilities and sensitivities to harm themselves and society, instead of making the contributions of which they are capable" (p. 17). It was necessary, then, to conduct research where there was reason to believe that harm was done to and by students who display gifted/talented characteristics through violent actions.

At the time I began this study, I questioned whether these were intellectually/creatively gifted adolescents, or students of the average intellect/creativity. I thought the planning involved in the most violent of all the shootings, Columbine, had to be extensive – this would be indicative of complex thinking and resistance to closure, traits associated with intellectually and creatively gifted students (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). It was not long into the literature when I discovered that one of the shooters was reported as having an intelligence quotient of 120, which is within two standard

deviations above the mean (Newman et al, 2004). This was certainly a strong indication of intellectual giftedness. In further study, I found that, "The boys who killed were generally considered bright with exceptional computer savvy. But their talents were devalued in these athletic-centered communities..." (Urso Spina, 2000). These were indications of giftedness with creativity as well. Therefore, in the spiraling fashion of qualitative research (McMilliam & Schumacher, 1997; Wiersma & Jurs, 2005), I returned to the main question for this study for alteration. The focus needed to allow for the potential to extend from whether or not the adolescent shooters were gifted/creative to: *in which way(s)* were they gifted/creative, if at all? An analysis of the writings, videotapes, and audiotapes of Kipland Kinkel, Eric Harris, Dylan Klebold, and T.J. Solomon is included in chapter four. Descriptive case studies of the shootings in which they were involved precedes in chapter three.

#### Purpose of the Study

As mentioned in the introduction, this study was designed to discover the character commonalities between the school rampage shooters, and their commonalities with students diagnosed as gifted/talented with emotional/behavioral disorders. The results I expected to gain from this study included, but were not limited to: (1) an in depth, multi-tiered picture of who these adolescents are/were, their aspirations, temperaments and personalities, their academic, intellectual, and creative strengths, and how each exceptionality affected the other; (2) illumination of potential connections between the shooters' actions and tendencies of students who are G/T; (3) patterns of behaviors and diagnosis commonalities between the two exceptionality areas of G/T and



E/BD; (4) potential implications for educational policy, instructional programming, and diagnostic methods; and (5) illumination of a variety of perspectives regarding the shooters' personal and academic environments, which include the influences of peers, teachers, the academic organization, their families, and attitudes surrounding them.

### Methodology

The methodology for this inquiry was qualitative, more specifically, historiographical. According to McMillian and Schumacher (1997), historiographical research is differentiated from other forms of qualitative research because there is no interaction between the researcher and the documents studied. Historiography intends to describe or interpret events from the past by analyzing selected documents from preserved collections and/or testimonies (McMillian & Schumacher, 1997). Given the nature of the diagnostic procedures in special education, most students are not assessed on their creative and/or academic talents; therefore, an analysis was conducted on the rampage shooters' personal writings, videotapes, and the oral testimonies derived from the times of the shootings and their trials. Reputable documentaries were used as secondary sources to ascertain whether there were indications of giftedness. An analysis of creative attributes derived from the research conducted by E. Paul Torrance (1966), Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1996), and Leta Stetter Hollingworth (1942) was utilized to ascertain the presence of creativity (see Appendix A); and a complementary analysis on the shooters' usage of Multiple Intelligences as outlined by Howard Gardner (1993, 1998, 1999, 2000) was employed to determine the presence and type(s) of intellectual



giftedness (see Appendix B). These criteria are in the form of checklists in Appendix A and B.

By combining the findings from the aforementioned researchers in creativity, I checked off the traits demonstrated in each of the writings from the four boys studied. This was completed by my usage of the checklist in Appendix A as I read through the evidence on each shooter. Thus, if the majority of items on the creativity checklist were checked off while analyzing the evidence, this would be one indicator of creative giftedness. If the majority of criteria were not checked, but there were repeated instances where particular criteria were checked off, then this would be indicative of a specific form of creative giftedness. In contrast, if there were instances where some creative criteria were checked off, but it was not consistent throughout their writings and/or videotapes, this led me to inconclusive results.

Regarding the intelligences, I employed the criteria derived from Howard Gardner's research (1993, 1998, 1999, 2000) to create the checklist in Appendix B. This served as a mode by which to evaluate the types of intellectual strengths of these boys. It is important to note that there is a limitation with this: it did not serve as a measure of their intelligence, rather the type of intelligence used in their writings, and the type(s) of intelligence that depicted their thinking style(s). Where possible, I relied on the psychological evaluations, the minor mentions of their academic successes, interests, and intelligence quotients in the research of the shootings to indicate a measure of their intellectual potential. After this, I combined this information with the creativity data, and the subsequent comparison to the national definition of gifted/talented from the National

Association of the Gifted/Talented, and the Council for Exceptional Children to determine a diagnosis of gifted/talented in the academic and/or intellectual realms. The historical documents referred to above were qualitatively analyzed to derive codes, categories, and themes. These historical documents included, but were not be limited to, excerpts of the shooters' journals and essays, police reports and interviews, and government studies on the school shootings. The categories derived from the historical documents were compared to current scholarly literature in the field of G/T and E/BD education, and then compared to characteristics associated with G/T students as delineated in National Association of the Gifted Child (NAGC) research-based identification criteria, and the Council for Exceptional Children's (CEC) definition of gifted/talented and emotional/behavioral disorders. Additionally, social-emotional aspects of giftedness were included in the comparative analysis, and these were elaborated upon by reputable researchers in the field of gifted/talented and special education. Case studies of the identified rampage shootings and the perpetrators will be descriptive, in-depth, and based on the perceptions of those involved in and around the shootings and their aftermath.

I used three other primary sources for the analyses in this study. *Deadly Lessons: Understanding Lethal School Violence* (NRCIMNA, 2003) is an in depth study published as a book that focused on six shootings, one of which I analyze further in chapters two and four: the incident at Heritage High School in Conyers, Georgia, committed by T.J. Solomon. The study entitled *Rampage: The Social Roots of School Shootings* (Newman et al, 2004) focused on similar cases, yet the authors continued their research into the



Columbine High School shooting committed by Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris in Littleton, Colorado (a Denver suburb). In addition, the study entitled *Failure to Hold: The Politics of School Violence* (Webber, 2003), discussed the violence displayed by Kip Kinkel at Thurston High School in Springfield, Oregon. All four of the boys involved in the three shooting incidences were included in the analyses in chapters two and four as well.

### Definitions of Terms

*Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD)*: This is described as the difficulty associated with focus and concentration on particular stimuli. For those who have the hyperactive type of this disorder, the behaviors displayed can be attributed to difficulty with the selection process, and the constant need for motion. For those who have the inattentive type, the behaviors displayed can be attributed to difficulty in selecting to focus on a particular stimulus, and a failure to respond or follow through on instructions or school work. (APA, 2000)

*Bullying*: Bullying “is a specific type of aggression in which (1) the behavior is intended to harm or disturb, (2) the behavior occurs repeatedly over time, and (3) there is an imbalance of power, with a more powerful person or group attacking a less powerful one” (Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, & Scheidt, 2001, p. 3).

Additionally, this abuse may be physical or psychological.

*Comorbidity*: The combination of two or more areas of exceptionality (e.g., gifted and emotionally disturbed, gifted with AD/HD, visually impaired with a learning disability).

*Creative and Productive Thinking:* Typically thought of as nontraditional talents (Olenchak, 1999), this ability refers to the creation of meaningful connections between areas that appear to be disconnected upon initial glance (CEC, 2007).

*Depression:* This is described as a mood disorder in which the person feels as though meaning as been removed from life. The depressed person may appear moody for several days, may show a diminished capacity for enjoying life, may feel tired all the time or not need much sleep at all, may not have the ability to concentrate or focus, and/or may hold thoughts of suicide (APA, 2000).

*Dual Exceptionalities:* As with the term *comorbidity*, this indicates that a child has two diagnoses of exceptionality.

*Emotional/Behavioral Disorders:* Disorders referred to by the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) that affect a child's emotions and behavior, including anxiety, mood, and anger disorders.

*General Intellectual Ability (GIA):* This refers to a person's overall intellectual ability, as opposed to a specific area of intellect (e.g., mathematics or language arts). This is typically referred to as a person's overall I.Q. (intelligence quotient) score (CEC, 2007).

In any given intelligence test, there are several subtests which measure various aptitudes and skills such as verbal ability, reading and mathematical aptitude, visual-spatial orientation, and memory and processing abilities. Each of these subtests receives a score dependent upon the participant's responses; all scores are combined into the overall GIA.

*Gifted/Talented:* "Students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in

specific academic fields, and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities” (NCLB, 2002). Additionally, the National Association of the Gifted Child (NAGC) defines this as, “someone who shows, or has the potential for showing, an exceptional level of performance in one or more areas of expression” (NAGC, 2008).

*Leadership Ability:* These are traits inherent in some individuals who are able to positively direct people toward a particular goal or action (CEC, 2007). These traits may include negotiation and conflict resolution skills.

*Multiple Intelligences:* In cognitive theory, this includes at least nine modes by which a person can be intelligent. They include verbal-linguistic, naturalistic, mathematical/logical, body/kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, visual-spatial, and existential (Gardner, 1993, 1998, 1999) modes by which a person can demonstrate their understanding of a topic, or through which a person can learn.

*Nontraditional Talents:* “[T]alents and gifts [that] exist in those domains distinct from the intellectual, academic, and athletic realms. They are especially talented in one or more areas of human pursuit although their talent is reflected in domains unique from those customarily served by schools” (Olenchak, 1999, p. 1). These could include theatrical and visually artistic talents, intuitiveness, spirituality, emotional acuity, and/or creativity.

*Psychomotor Ability:* These abilities involve athletic skills, spatial and mechanical skills. Although this is a widely accepted form of giftedness, it is not the typical criteria employed in qualifying students for gifted/talented services in the academic setting (Webb et al, 2005; CEC, 2007).



*Rampage Shooting:* These are shootings that meet the following qualifying criteria: they (1) “take place on a school-related public stage before an audience;” (2) “involve multiple victims, some of whom are shot simply for their symbolic significance or at random;” and (3) “involve one or more shooters who are students or former students of the school” (Newman et al, 2004, p. 50).

*Specific Academic Aptitude or Talent:* As mentioned above, this is a singular and specific area of exceptional performance/ability, such as mathematical reasoning (CEC, 2007). These independent talents may take the form of what Howard Gardner (1993) theorized as being one of the multiple intelligences.

*Symbolism:* “artistic imitation or invention that is a method of revealing or suggesting immaterial, ideal, or otherwise intangible truth or states” (Meriam-Webster online, 2008).

*Violence:* Either a physical force intended to do harm to self or another, or the non-physical, psychological abuse of power over another. Behaviors encompassed with this are stalking, bullying, extreme teasing, forced sexual acts, sexual harassment, shootings or actions involving weapons, or any force causing physical or emotional abuse to self or others.

*Visual and Performing Arts:* Those who are gifted in this area display their talents through visual art, music, dance, drama, or other related areas (CEC, 2007). They are viewed also as nontraditional talents (Olenchak, 1999).

#### Delimitations of the Study

*Delimitation 1:* Due to the nature of what was studied, authentic resources were limited. In the Columbine shootings, both perpetrators took their own lives, therefore eliminating

the possibility of interviewing them for further clarification of their authentic journals. In the Thurston High and Heritage High cases, both perpetrators are currently incarcerated, but are pending sentence reduction hearings. In order to protect my family in case the reduction may be granted, I chose not to disclose my identity by interviewing them for this initial study.

*Delimitation 2: Because of the national response to these shootings, and the wealth of media coverage, there may be instances where small pieces of the cases that would not affect the outcome of this study may be filled in with sources that were unverifiable. Only verifiable, and authentic documents were analyzed to ensure objectivity and accuracy in my assessment of their giftedness/creativity. However, where there were gaps in the testimony and investigative documents that recreated the events of the shootings, other sources of information were inserted, such as documentaries presented on the A & E channel (Investigative Reports, and The 20<sup>th</sup> Century with Mike Wallace), and PBS channel (Frontline).*

*Delimitation 3: The available evidence was given to me from prosecuting attorneys and investigators building cases against the shooters involved; therefore, this study was limited to an analysis of documents that were used to convict or to find blame on the perpetrators. In a sense, the evidence for this study was chosen for me. However, this posed an interesting possibility: what if the same evidence used in convicting the shooters would also serve as evidence of their giftedness that was not considered by other studies? This may be a limitation from one perspective, but it may be a floodgate from another.*

#### Description of Study Outline

In chapter one I introduced this study. It also addressed the purpose and need for the study, and provided a brief overview of the various methods employed throughout. Chapter two provides a literature review of the research associated with G/T and E/BD education and diagnoses. In the literature review, self-efficacy theory is explored, and the neurology of the development of self-efficacy is outlined. This serves as a mode by which to make sense of the selected participants' psychological diagnoses. In addition, a meta-analysis of the scholarly studies conducted by governmental and educative researchers on the rampage shootings and school violence is provided.

Chapter three details case studies involving the shooters Kipland Kinkel of Springfield, Oregon, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold of Littleton, Colorado, and T.J. Solomon of Conyers, Georgia, based on the sources available. Chapter four is an analysis of the rampage shooters' authentic writings where the categories and themes are described and discussed. In chapter five, I integrate the similarities derived from chapters two, three, and four into a holistic synthesis. I also describe the implications of this study, and recommendations for future studies and actions.



## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND META-ANALYSIS

The scholarly literature on violence directly associated with gifted/creative students was negligible. In fact, there were few articles that mentioned it as a possible concern. Schuler (2002, 2003) wrote of the susceptibility of gifted students to being bullied. Cross (2001) wrote of the “rage” of gifted children, and their unique ability to sympathize with the belief systems delineated in the journals and actions of the rampage shooters. The National Research Council Institute of Medicine of the National Academies (NRCIMNA, 2003) passively reported on the shooters’ academic abilities by simply stating their academic achievements were average to above average, with a decline in performance nearing their violent attacks. Newman, Fox, Harding, Mehta, and Roth (2004), the researchers affiliated with the National Academy of Sciences (NAS), were hired by the Department of Education to investigate, using mixed methods, several rampage shootings in the wake of a seemingly new wave of mass shootings in the late 1990s. They, too, passively reported the shooters’ I.Q. scores, and went no further into their intelligence, creativity, or other capabilities.

Especially upsetting and significant to me in this “wave” of school violence in the late 1990s were the violent attacks on schools specifically by rampage shooters. By definition, a rampage shooting must involve a public audience in a school-related setting, be conducted by one or more shooters who were students of that school, and multiple

victims must be chosen for symbolic reasons or at random (Newman et al, 2004). Muschert (2007) furthered this definition by including that this type of shooting was “expressive” as opposed to a targeted attack on a specific individual. Being an educator and researcher interested in gifted/talented education and emotional/behavioral disorders in children, the final portions of the criteria leapt out at me: *symbolic* reasons, and *expressive* rather than targeted. A symbolic act is an abstract form of thought or reasoning that provokes a subsequent behavior. This is a practice that comes easily for creatively gifted students.

In philosophical terminology, abstraction is the thought process wherein ideas are distanced from objects. Abstraction uses a strategy of simplification, wherein formerly concrete details are left ambiguous, vague, or undefined; thus effective communication about things in the abstract requires an intuitive or common experience between the communicator and the communication recipient.

(Wikipedia, 2008)

More prevalent in creative students, abstraction of thought is often a mode of life; included in this is their form of expression.

In contrast to the symbolic and expressive rampage shootings, “classroom avengers” (McGee & DeBernardo, 1999; Muschert, 2007; NRCIMNA, 2003) committed targeted shootings which were highly defined; they were accomplished by current or former members of the school who attack specific individuals (Muschert, 2007). In comparison, both types of shootings were carried out to extort revenge for a *perceived* mistreatment (Muschert, 2007). Perceptions of self and others as people associate in

various environments were the essence of self-efficacy theory; how situations are perceived by people affects the outcomes of their emotions and successive behaviors (Bandura, 1994, 1986). Perceptions, symbolic thought and actions, and modes of expression of gifted students are detailed further in the subsequent literature review and meta-analysis.

## Literature Review

### *Self-Efficacy Theory*

Self-efficacy was defined by Bandura (1994, 1986) as people's beliefs in themselves – beliefs in their abilities to have a level of control in performing a specific task that would have an effect on their lives. This was a controversial challenge to the popular behavioral theory so widely accepted at the time of its inauguration (Pajares, 2002). Bandura (1994, 1986) suggested that humans have the innate ability to *control*, to varying degrees, their thoughts, motivations, value systems, emotional reactions, and successive cognitive, emotional, and physical actions.

A strong sense of self-efficacy, as Bandura (1994, 1986) described, offered a person the ability to reduce stress and elude depressive states. One way to accomplish this was by accepting failure with a more positive attitude, that the failure to accomplish a task was due to a lack of information or skill that could be learned (Pajares, 2002). Lower self-efficacy meant that a person would attribute failure to their own personal deficiencies. These, in turn, would affect a person's motivation to either strive further in the face of adversity, or to give up altogether or set lower ambitions. Bandura (1994) claimed that children learn perseverance through challenges, successes, and failures. He



further noted that perseverance contributed to resiliency: the ability to rise to your feet and determine to try again when success was not attained the first time. He exhorted that continuous effort was necessary to build strength in self-efficacy. Daniel Goleman (1998), a revered expert on emotional intelligence (EI), concurred with Bandura (1994, 1986) when he proclaimed that some suffering offered constructive benefits to creativity and spirituality by soothing the soul.

In the synthesis conducted by Pajares (2002) of social-cognitive theory and of Bandura's (1994, 1986) extension into self-efficacy theory, he wrote that this complex system was regulated by a person's attention, retention, production, and motivation. In essence, the stimuli that a person selects to attend to must be retained in memory by symbolic coding so that he could then apply this template in his life. If the outcomes of that action were valued, he would become motivated to repeat the action in the future (Pajares, 2002). According to the theory, this process held true for the academic, familial, and social environments (Pajares, 2002).

Bandura (1994) continued with four sources for altering levels of self-efficacy: through (1) mastery experiences; (2) vicarious learning; (3) social persuasion; and (4) a reduction in people's stress reactions, and an alteration of "their negative emotional proclivities and misinterpretations of their physical states" (p. 3). His theory postulated that when people succeeded at challenges, belief in their abilities increased. Similarly, a person could learn from another's mistakes and successes to build confidence, adding to self-belief, and ultimately self-efficacy. Additionally, social persuasion through positive or negative person-to-person communication (e.g., praise phrases such as, "You can do

it!" or negative phrases such as, "You can't do anything right!") affected levels of effort and performance; positive phrases led to increased levels of performance, and negative phrases led to decreased levels of performance. Lastly, his theory stipulated that the first three sources of self-efficacy had the power to impinge upon the fourth: stress load, and people's tendencies toward negative thinking and distortions of themselves. These, in turn, affected how people perceived themselves in the context of their environment (Bandura, 1994).

It is not the sheer intensity of emotional and physical reactions that is important but rather how they are *perceived* and *interpreted* [italics added]. People who have a high sense of efficacy are likely to view their state of affective arousal as an energizing facilitator of performance, whereas those who are beset by self-doubts regard their arousal as a debilitator. (Bandura, 1994, p. 3)

According to Goleman (1998), there were stressors that people judged positive or negative according to their own value and symbolic coding systems. Good stress was interpreted by the brain to marshal people into action, motivate and mobilize. It involved the activation of the neurochemicals adrenaline and noradrenaline, among others, which allowed people to be productive thinkers and doers. The bad stress, in contrast, was interpreted by the brain as a danger; these seemed to be viewed as too overwhelming about which to do anything, and this led to the demoralization of personal character (Goleman, 1998, p. 89). The stress hormone cortisol was secreted, which stimulated parts of the brain unlike those stimulated by the good stress hormones (Goleman, 1998). Cortisol aimed directly for the limbic system, the emotional center of the brain that



activated the fight, flight, or appeasement response (Carter, 1998). The prefrontal cortex was regulated by adrenaline and noradrenaline; it allowed rationality into the emotions, regulated attention to several details, and these aided in planning for future situations (Carter, 1998; Goleman, 1998). When the limbic system was activated without the balanced regulation of the pre-frontal cortex, emotional outbursts appeared (Goleman, 1998).

Bandura (1994) continued with the psychological processes affected by self-beliefs; they included cognitive (intellect and skills), motivational (internal value systems), affective (emotions), and selection (attention). A person with high self-efficacy was more likely to try new things, bounce back from failures with resiliency, and attend to more things without fear (Bandura, 1994; Goleman, 1998). A person with low self-efficacy was more likely to avoid controversy, buckle in the face of adversity, attend to only what interested them and in which they were skilled, and become more deeply depressed when failures occurred (Bandura, 1994).

Bandura's theory of self-efficacy assumed that people did not live in a vacuum; it was one that integrated internal *and* external influences (Bandura, 1994, 1986; Pajares, 2002). This interplay was comprised of (1) personal factors, including cognitive abilities and talents, emotional tendencies, and biological factors; (2) environmental factors such as social templates, academic organization, familial structures, and community belief systems; and finally, (3) behaviors (Bandura, 1994; Pajares, 2002). According to the theory, each of these aspects was both an influential factor and dependent upon the

others; thus, each was a producer and product of the others (Bandura, 1994, 1986; Pajares, 2002).

Pajares (2002) warned readers of the need for accuracy in making judgments of our own abilities, skills, actions, and choices. He declared that these are the basis of our judgment of self, in determining whether or not we deem ourselves capable of completing various tasks, and in determining a level of self-value (Pajares, 2002). The work of Bandura (1986) reflected the importance of self-reflection in determining appropriate judgments. He wrote that people were capable of making sense of themselves and others; therefore, they were capable of planning change, producing changes in their beliefs and values of self, and subsequently, capable of planning and implementing alternative behaviors (Pajares, 2002). According to this theory, then, accuracy of perception was a vital piece in making judgments of situations since there would be successive actions based on them. The significant stipulation to self-efficacy theory rested with the individual's *perception* of their abilities in various environments rather than their *actual* abilities.

#### *Emotional Intelligence & Related Disorders*

It is important that we understand the role of the limbic system if we are to consider how the emotional center contributes to or detracts from how the rest of the brain interprets the world. The limbic system is what cognitivists such as Gardner (1993), and Balota & Marsh (2004), and Goleman (1998, 2008) claim to be the area in which new information becomes part of long-term memory storage. In the learning process, new pieces of information are attached to an emotion – in the form of a neurochemical that is



emitted from the amygdala, an almond-shaped biological machine that plays an important part in the limbic system. Once the emotion is attached, it is thought that the new information travels through the hippocampus to its resting place in long-term memory storage.

Daniel Goleman (1998) defined emotional intelligence (EI) as the ability to control our emotions, to read others' emotions, and to use this information effectively in a given situation. He stressed the necessity of having a balance of stimulation in our emotional center, also known as the limbic system, and the rational executive functions, also known as the prefrontal cortex.

Goleman (1998, 2008) and Carter (1998) reported that the prefrontal cortex was responsible for rationalizing emotional stimulations sent from the limbic system. The limbic system was in command of the fight-flight-appeasement (anxiety, nervousness) responses to stimuli. The limbic system then sent neurochemical stimulation to the prefrontal cortex to make sense of and rationalize through the situation, and plan for further action; its function was then to resend neurochemical stimulation back to the limbic center so that appropriate emotional reactions could occur and remain in long term memory storage. Hence, balance in these two areas was vital if people were to be effective and positive influences on others, and in maintaining healthy emotions (Carter, 1998; Goleman, 1998).

Carter (1998) continued with stating that the prefrontal cortex was not yet developed in adolescents and younger children; full maturity of this portion of the brain was not evident until adulthood. The limbic system, however, was considered part of the



reptilian brain in evolutionary terms, and therefore had more time to evolve. Thus, its development was much nearer to maturity in young children. She suggested that irrational outbursts in children were to be expected since their higher order thinking skills could not balance out their emotional behavioral responses in the limbic system. To do so would require strong neurochemical stimulation from the prefrontal cortex to calm the limbic system, a neurochemical superhighway still in need of development (Carter, 1998).

As a largely influential piece of Bandura's theoretical puzzle of self-efficacy (1994, 1986), emotional intelligence could be viewed as a foundational source of self-control, self-confidence, and self-esteem. These were feeders for high levels of self-efficacy. However, Goleman (1998) added that it was necessary to have good and bad emotions in a continuous balance to maintain a healthy well-being. In the absence of this balance, Goleman (1998) stated, "When emotions are too muted they create dullness and distance; when out of control, too extreme and persistent, they become pathological, as in immobilizing depression, overwhelming anxiety, raging anger, manic agitation" (p. 56).

### *Depression*

There are several characteristics that described the depressive state. Carter (1998) described it as an existence of despair, guilt, anxiety, pain, and sheer exhaustion. In addition, she wrote that the logical thought processes of the brain slowed during bouts of depression (Carter, 1998). In combination, these feelings prompted those who suffered with the condition to contemplate suicide (Carter, 1998). In many, these symptoms manifested themselves in loss of appetite, sleep deprivation, irrational fear and/or

agitation, and a sense of worthlessness. The “meaning is missing in things” (Carter, 1998, p. 100).

Carter (1998) claimed that one area of the brain affected by this condition included the frontal lobes. Sitting slightly above and in front of the limbic center, underactivity in the frontal lobe was responsible for the inability to control self-willed behavior, a major factor in self-efficacy. If the theory of self-efficacy and its underpinnings in emotional intelligence held true, this would mean that the prefrontal cortex was unable to resend resilient stimuli back to the limbic center to make rational sense of a given situation (Carter, 1998; Goleman, 1998).

The limbic center, however, was overactive according to the SPECT scans Carter (1998) studied. With the intensely negative stimuli being sent to the prefrontal cortex for planning and motivation for rational action, and the lack of logical stimuli received in return by the limbic system, the negative thoughts became more intense.

Moreover, Carter (1998) asserted that the parietal and temporal lobes were negatively impacted with depression as well. She and Goleman (1998) claimed this area was associated with attention (selection), especially to the outside world. This was hypothesized as the reason why so many depressed individuals seemed to be trapped in a descending, fixated thought spiral, being without motivation to accomplish anything.

The lower part of the prefrontal cortex that sits directly above and is densely connected to the limbic system was also underactive during the depressive state (Carter, 1998). This binding was responsible for connecting the conscious mind with the unconscious; its purpose was to help people make sense of their perceptions, to make



them into a meaningful whole. Perhaps this was similar to creativity in that one of the characteristics associated with creative people was their proclivities toward combining reality with fantasy (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996).

In bipolar disorder, people cycled through depressive and manic states. During the manic state, this same area of the brain became overactive.

A person in this state is euphoric, full of energy and flowing with love. They are also in a state of high creativity – the connections they see between things, which are often invisible or overlooked by others, are often used by them to make new concepts. (Carter, 1998, p. 197)

### *Anger & Rage*

According to research accomplished by Carter (1998) and Goleman (1998), anger and rage were two extreme states experienced by those who were diagnosed with any of several neurological conditions. These included but were not limited to anti-social personality disorder (ASPD), attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD), depression, oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), and anxiety disorders.

Carter (1998) discussed the neurology of anger and rage, and their association with ASPDs. Anti-social personality disorder was described as a condition in which the sufferer appeared to have “emotional coldness,” a pattern of bullying behavior and deceit, a love for risk-taking, and a lack of remorse (p. 93). She noted the connection between the lack of stimulation in the cortical (conscious thinking) areas of the brain causing periods of rage in people (Carter, 1998). Referring to a study of 41 murderers, Carter (1998) also mentioned that every one of the participants had reduced frontal lobe activity,

which may have contributed to a lack of impulse control. Lastly, she referred to the person with ASPD as one who was nonreactive to threatening stimuli.

Goleman (1998) concurred with Carter's description of ASPD, then made the link to agitation, impulsivity, and boredom.

This pattern shows up in infancy as being restless, cranky, and hard to handle, in grade school as having the "fidgets," hyperactivity, and getting into trouble, a propensity that... can push such children to seek out friends on the fringe – sometimes leading to a criminal career or the diagnosis of "antisocial personality disorder." Such people (and they are usually men) have as their main emotional complaint agitation; their main weakness is unrestrained impulsivity; their usual reaction to boredom – which they often feel – is an impulsive search for risk and excitement. (pp. 254-5)

Similar to behaviors associated with gifted and talented children in classrooms where their intellectual and creative needs were not being fulfilled, boredom and risk-taking actions were evoked (Webb et al, 2005). Their brains naturally sought stimulation; yet, they were not gratified through healthful modes.

#### *Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder*

For years, the diagnosis of ADHD stirred controversy. Friend (2007) said it may appear to be overdiagnosed to the layperson; she also said it may appear to be underdiagnosed to others. Friend (2007) and Amen (1998) stated that currently, many in the medical and psychological field said it is neither; doctors simply know more about the disorder since the dramatic increase in brain research, so they can subsequently diagnose



it better. There were three distinct types of ADHD: (1) hyperactive/impulsive, (2) inattentive, and (3) combined type (APA, 2000).

Those who suffered with ADHD appeared to have a marked decrease in prefrontal cortex activity when trying to concentrate on a task (Amen, 1998; Carter, 1998). During relaxed times, however, the activity in this area seemed to increase and maintain normal levels (Amen, 1998).

How people maintained attention was less than simplistic; it involved several areas of the brain, namely, the reticular activating system (RAS), superior colliculus, parietal cortex, and the thalamus (Carter, 1998). The RAS seemed to be the manufacturing area for a number of neurochemicals, especially dopamine and noradrenaline, the major stimulants responsible for the bulk of the brain's work. Its role in attention laid in arousal.

The superior colliculus and the parietal cortex worked simultaneously. The superior colliculus was laden with the motor portion of turning eyes to a new stimulus; while the parietal cortex allowed the brain's consciousness to make the orientation switch to the new stimulus (Carter, 1998).

The thalamus, a part of the limbic system that played a role in maintaining memories in long-term memory storage, acted as a spotlight toward the new stimulus (Carter, 1998). It locked onto the new stimulus, shunted information about it to the frontal lobes, then it maintained attention to it.

In children who display symptoms of ADHD, it was found on imaging studies that the cortical (thinking) areas of the brain were not as active as the emotional center

(Carter, 1998); this therefore created a discrepancy that emitted itself in atypical behaviors. The areas mostly concerned with ADHD were located in the right hemisphere: the anterior cingulate, prefrontal cortex, and auditory cortex. Each with its own duties, the anterior cingulate aided in fixing attention on a given stimulus; the prefrontal cortex aided in controlling impulses and planning actions; and the auditory cortex integrated stimuli from several areas to make sense of it all. Those with difficulty in the auditory cortex were also said to have trouble seeing "the big picture" in situations (Carter, 1998, p. 187).

#### *In Sum*

The aforementioned nonexhaustive list of disorders that have had a direct connection to the emotional centers included the involvement of the prefrontal cortex. This area that was so intimately engaged to the limbic center was responsible for rationalizing through extrinsic information, internal value systems, emotions, and memories, and for planning for future actions based on the synthesis of all this information. It held a vital piece of human existence: the ability to develop self-efficacy.

Carter (1998) claimed that "cortical maturity can be accelerated by use" (p. 90). In intellectually gifted children, the cortical areas of the brain where higher order thinking skills occur seemed to be used more so than the typical brain of the same age. This begs the question, however, of whether or not the superhighway between the prefrontal cortex and the limbic system still may be underdeveloped in intellectually gifted children. In addition, it begs the question of whether or not this connection is any more or less developed in creatively gifted children.

### *Defining Gifted & Talented*

Several researchers and organizations in the field of gifted and talented education have offered varying definitions of what is meant to be gifted/talented and creative. Among them are Francoys Gagne (1985), Joseph Renzulli (1978), Howard Gardner (1993, 1998, 1999), E. Paul Torrance (1966), the National Association for the Gifted Child (NAGC, 2008), and the Columbus Group (1991). The current status of defining gifted and talented for educative purposes is permissive; each state is allowed to have their own definition of giftedness if they choose to acknowledge this form of exceptionality at all (NAGC, 2007).

For the intents and purposes of this study, the following list is a synopsis of the commonalities derived from the varying definitions of giftedness. Gifted and talented children “show, or have the potential for showing, an exceptional level of performance” in any or all of the following areas: (1) general intellectual ability (GIA), (2) specific academic aptitude, (3) creative or productive thinking, (4) leadership ability, (5) visual or performing arts (Marland, 1972), and (6) psychomotor ability (Webb, Amend, Webb, Goerss, Beljan, & Olenchak, 2005; CEC, 2007). In addition to this, the gifted were defined as those who also require academic accommodations that extend beyond the standard curriculum in order for them to develop their full potential (NAGC, 2005).

#### *Creativity and Visual/Performing Arts*

Over time, creativity and visual/performing arts became associated with the field of gifted and talented. They currently are included in the federal definition of giftedness (Clark, 2008). Historically, the concept of there being an association between giftedness



and creativity was controversial, and many experts still differ in their interpretations (Clark, 2008). The contemporary concept of creativity was heavily influenced by interpretations presented by Sternberg and Lubart (1993), Renzulli (1992), Feldman (as cited in Piirto, 1998), Gowan (1981), and Csikszentmihalyi (1996). These explanations ranged from the notion that creativity simply supplemented intelligence (Sternberg and Lubart, 1993; Feldman as cited in Piirto, 1998), to creativity being a part of each intelligence delineated by Gardner (1993). In essence, this would mean that creativity is inseparable from intelligence.

Those who conducted research in the realm of creativity such as Leta Stetter Hollingworth (1942), E. Paul Torrance (1962, 1966), and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1996), discovered commonalities within those identified as being creative individuals. Torrance (1962, 1966) discovered that creative thinkers emitted certain characteristics of thought that were measurable through figural and verbal assessments. They included fluency, originality, flexibility, elaboration, abstraction, and the resistance to closure (*persistence*). The foundational work of Hollingworth (1942) enhanced Torrance's (1966) conclusions by adding that the creative personality entertained complexity by thriving on problem solving. This, in turn, was displayed through extreme curiosities from which they were able to create unusual connections between seemingly unrelated items, and construct hypotheses without high levels of inhibition (Hollingworth, 1942). According to the neurology of self-efficacy, the process of integrating seemingly unrelated stimuli was the responsibility of the prefrontal cortex (Amen, 1998; Carter, 1998; Goleman, 1998).



Csikszentmihalyi (1996), a highly publicized expert in the field of creativity, showed interest in the motivation behind it. He wrote on what he termed as the “paradoxical traits of the creative personality,” in which was evidence of the work of Hollingworth (1942) and Torrance (1966). They included the following: creative people (1) had large amounts of physical energy, yet they often appeared to be quiet and at rest much of the time; (2) tended to be highly intelligent, yet quite naïve; (3) integrated playfulness with discipline, and responsibility with irresponsibility; (4) alternated thoughts of reality and fantasy, sometimes combining the two; (5) appeared to be introverted and extroverted simultaneously; (6) appeared to emit humility and pride simultaneously; (7) tended to escape the societal gender role stereotyping; (8) combined rebelliousness with conservative tendencies; (9) were very passionate about their work, yet could be objective about it as well; and (10) due to their passion for work, their sensitivities may have left them susceptible to emotional pain or joy (1996). Others contributed to a list of characteristics of creative people, yet offered a caution since no two creative individuals mirrored each other (Clark, 2008).

Many interpretations of creativity included a message on problem solving. Mumford (as cited in Clark, 2008) mentioned that several cognitive models existed for problem solving; some were logical and controlled modes, while others were considered uncontrollable and unconscious.

Csikszentmihalyi (1996) theorized that creativity was a triadic interaction among: (1) the individual, (2) the culture in which that individual exists, and (3) the social network surrounding the person (Clark, 2008); this interpretation was analogous to self-

efficacy theory. He weighted the joys of discovery, precociousness, and the use of individual interests for motivation more so than the cognitive elements of creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996).

To summarize and create a more holistic view of creativity, we can classify characteristics into four separate but interconnected areas: affective (emotional), physical (sensing), cognitive (logical), and intuitive (unconscious) (Clark, 2008).

### *Nurturing Creativity*

According to Clark (2008) there seemed to be conditions under which creativity was nurtured and inhibited. Support for children to implement the creative process was deemed necessary in the home, school, and social environments (Clark, 2008). In all areas Clark (2008) asserted that there needed to be an aura of emotional safety so that the creative child could feel comfortable trying out new risks that could leave them emotionally exposed. These risk-taking opportunities should engage children cognitively, physically, affectively, and intuitively (Clark, 2008).

In the home, Clark (2008) claimed that parents of creative children should be less authoritarian, and offer more guidance for children to make decisions (Clark, 2008). Correspondingly, Clark (2008) stated that the academic environment must allow for creativity to blossom. Teachers were endowed with the most direct responsibility in providing this environment for all children, especially those who tended to be more creative. Clark (2008) also listed a series of descriptors of teachers who were successful in developing creativity in students. They provided convergent, divergent, and evaluative thinking activities, and utilized fewer activities centered on memorization. They

employed evaluations as formative assessments for their instruction and curriculum, as opposed to a value judgment of the students. In addition, these teachers offered their students multiple opportunities to use their knowledge in creative ways, and encouraged healthy stimulation through questioning strategies. They valued original ideas, and taught skills for adding fluency, flexibility, and originality to their unique ideas. Through experimentation, these teachers let the children utilize the scientific method for researching, deliberating, hypothesizing, and researching qualitatively (Clark, 2008).

#### *Issues in Gifted and Talented Education*

Arguments currently exist in the realm of gifted and talented education regarding its definition. Some still view it as simply being smarter than the average person; this dated back to the late 1800s when cognitive psychology was in its prenatal stages (Balota & Marsh, 2004). Other, more contemporary psychologists and educators, gleaned from the research a much more holistic and cognitive view of the terms *gifted* and *talented* (Gardner, 1993; Heacox, 2002; Olenchak, 1999; Renzulli, 1977; Ruf, 2005; Sternberg, 2005). Howard Gardner (1993), a cognitive theorist, challenged his readers to stop asking the question of “How smart are kids?” and commence the inquiry of, “How are kids smart?” This, in turn, attempted to alter the focus of giftedness from a quantitative I.Q. score (absolute) to a qualitative and much more complex perspective (relative) (VanTassel-Baska, 2000).

Discovering what giftedness is through a qualitative means appears to be multifaceted. Identification should include the exploration of traditional and nontraditional talents such as intellectual, academic, and creative strengths (Torrance,



1966), multicultural background information (Tomlinson, Ford, Reis, Briggs, & Strickland, 2004), unique social and emotional traits (Olenchak, 1999), various thinking and learning styles (deBono, 1999; Gardner, 1993), and complexity of thought (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956). Schuler (2003) stated that it was vital to synthesize the culture and values of a particular school and community when planning programs for G/T children so they would feel a sense of positive contribution. Additionally, there were levels of giftedness that indicated the G/T child's needs and abilities (Ruf, 2005). With this approach, there is little simplicity in the identification of G/T children; hence, contributions have been made to their misdiagnoses (Webb et al, 2005).

In 2004, the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) was reauthorized; the definition of gifted and talented was included with no alterations from prior authorizations. Even with the continued legal acknowledgment by the governing laws of special education for the gifted/talented form of exceptionality, states currently are enabled to accept or deny it as an area of concern for academic accommodations (Friend, 2008; NAGC 2, 2007).

The ripple effect of this permissive status, in addition to the push for standards-based instruction (Gardner, 2000; NCLB, 2007; Quart 2006), were linked to a multitude of problems in education for the G/T student, including: (1) underachievement (Buescher, & Higham [n.d.]; Gross, 1998; Hebert, 2004; Quart, 2006; Rubenzer & Twaite, 1979; Schuler, 2003); (2) a multiplex of funding issues (Quart, 2006); (3) the lack of professional development for teachers on gifted education (NAGC, 2008; Nicely, Small,

& Furman, 1980; Quart, 2006; Rubenzer & Twaite, 1979); any of which made contributions to troubles with their (4) specialized emotional needs (Cross, 2001; Gross, 1998; Jackson, 1998; Lind, 2003, 2001; Lovecky, 1992; Mendaglio, 2002; Monn, Kelly, & Feldhusen, 1997; Olenchak, 1999; Sak, 2004; Schuler, 2003, 2002; Sword, 2003).

### *Social-Emotional Issues with Giftedness*

Misdiagnoses of AD/HD, mood disorders, ideational and anxiety disorders, and anger disorders were reported to be prevalent for gifted and talented children (Olenchak, 1999; Webb et al, 2005); inner conflicts were great due to the discrepancy between the student's intellect and/or creativity being mismatched with the expectations of their peers and teachers, in addition to the mismatch with their emotional centers. Distinct to the gifted/talented form of exceptionality were the emotional intensities (Lovecky, 1992; Mendaglio, 2002; Sword, 2003; Webb et al, 2005), overexcitabilities (Dabrowski, 1966; Lind, 2001; Webb et al, 2005), asynchronous development (Silverman & Kreger, 1997; Webb et al, 2005), and the degree of depth in their search for identity (Olenchak, 1999). These extremes in emotionality and development affected the behaviors associated with these children (Olenchak, 1999). Passions for wanting to know about a particular topic of interest seemed to drive their actions; motivations through curiosities appeared to fuel their endless thirst for knowledge (Sword, 2003).

### *Emotional Intensities*

"Emotional intensity in the gifted is not a matter of feeling more than other people, but a *different* [italics added] way of experiencing the world: vivid, absorbing, penetrating, encompassing, complex, commanding – a way of being quiveringly alive"

(Piechowski, 1991, p. 181). This rich description offered readers a glance into the world of an emotionally intense child.

There may be consequences of this intensity, however. Just as G/T children and adults may feel extremely positive and radically alive when discovering and working within their passions, they may also feel extremely negative or depressed about others; or both positive and negative at the same time (Sword, 2003). As healthy as it may be to remember especially good times, it may be very unhealthy to remember the negative times with such precision. Brooks Brown, a friend and classmate of the Columbine shooters Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, who was also formally diagnosed as being gifted, co-authored a book entitled *No Easy Answers: The Truth Behind Death at Columbine* (Brown & Merritt, 2002). In Brown's remembrances he wrote of his American Civics class:

On test days in my American Civics class, those of us who finished early were allowed to use the rest of the class period for reading. One day, after I'd finished a test, I pulled out a copy of *Atlas Shrugged*, by Ayn Rand.

The teacher approached me and picked up the book from my desk.

"What are you doing?" I said.

"I don't like Ayn Rand," she said. "I don't want her being read in my classroom."

"You can't do that," I said. I was actually laughing. I couldn't believe it.

"You're going to take away a book in American Civics class?"



She responded that I was disrupting other students who were taking the test. I just shrugged, knowing I wasn't going to change her mind. A few days later, I got my book back. *But I never forgot* [italics added]. For kids who wanted to think for themselves and go outside the lines, Columbine High School was not the place to be. (pp. 55-56)

### *Overexcitabilities*

Kazimierz Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration (1966) postulated that there were five domains of overexcitabilities in human development: (1) psychomotor, or heightened neuromuscular action; (2) sensual, or heightened feelings of pleasure or displeasure through the five senses; (3) intellectual, or heightened need for understanding and truth; (4), imaginal, or a heightened ability to visualize and create rich impressions in the mind (fantasy integrated with reality); and (5) emotional, or heightened levels of emotional extremes, and a strong ability to identify with others' feelings (Lind, 2001, pp. 1-4). His theory found a home in gifted and talented education and research. Overexcitabilities were described as inherent intensities that indicated a stronger ability to react to stimuli; creative and gifted individuals appeared to be at greater risk for increases in "sensitivity, awareness, and intensity, and [they] represent a real difference in the fabric of life and quality of experience" (Lind, 2001, p. 1).

Again, there may be costs associated with these excitabilities in the traditional academic environment. Constant questioning of the teacher about the meaning of abstract concepts such as democracy versus socialism, and debates about creationism versus evolution have erupted in defensiveness of a belief system foreign or in contradiction to

the belief systems of the gifted child or of the teacher. Brooks Brown and his co-author (2002) wrote about his literature class when he was a freshman at Columbine.

Reminiscing about the time they had been discussing the book *Animal Farm* by George Orwell (1946) in class:

I felt that Orwell wrote the book as a criticism of socialism. However, our teacher at Columbine wanted us to look at it as "socialism gone wrong." She argued that the entire book is great, up until the point where the pigs became dominant. In my opinion, the point of the book is that things went wrong the moment the animals opted for socialism, and we were being taught the exact opposite of the author's intent.

Ideally, in a place where free exchange of ideas could happen, I could have argued that point without fear of repercussions. Instead, I kept my mouth shut. I had already been taught what happens when students went against the flow at Columbine. (Brown & Merritt, 2002, p. 54)

According to the research by Webb et al (2005), this precocious questioning of the teacher has often been regarded as belligerent behavior, and has resulted in a diagnosis of Conduct Disorder or Oppositional Defiant Disorder in extreme situations. Olenchak (1999) and Webb et al (2005) also wrote of the misunderstanding of behaviors associated with high creative abilities and the tendency toward diagnosing these students with AD/HD due to a lack of creative outlets in the academic environment.

Lastly, all of the aforementioned realms of overexcitabilities affected emotionality. Emotional intensities made the G/T child more susceptible to depressed

states due to peers' and teachers' continual misunderstanding of who the child was, and because of the child's emotional sensitivities (Sword, 2003; Webb et al, 2005).

### *Asynchronous Development*

Webb et al (2005) stated that asynchronous development was indicated by a child's intellect extending beyond their developmental or chronological years, or beyond their social environment or vice versa; Neihart, Reis, Robinson, and Moon (2002) concurred. Additionally, both sources included that internal and external forces influenced feelings associated with asynchrony (Neihart et al, 2002; Webb et al, 2005). Schuler (2003) added that the rapidity of development in various areas was one of the contributing factors to these feelings of confusion and inadequacy. Where the cognitive (intellectual) functioning was vastly developing, the emotional functions may struggle to catch up, thus, creating inner conflict (Schuler, 2003). This seemed to be in contrast to evolutionary theory of the brain, where researchers suggested that the limbic system (emotional functions) is more developed at birth. Thus, two questions surfaced, one of which is repetitious of former discussion in this literature review: (1) Could the super highway between the prefrontal cortex and the limbic system be underdeveloped in the gifted mind; or (2) Could the thinking parts of the G/T mind (cortex) develop so rapidly throughout their lives that it surpasses the maturity of the limbic system at earlier stages?

### *Influences on Developing Identity*

The unique combination of intensities, overexcitabilities, and asynchronous development, among other personality and temperamental tendencies, contributed to identity issues for gifted children, especially in combination with mismatched



environments (Cross, 2001; Gross, 1998). These equated to the personal influences in Bandura's triadic reciprocity, the notion that personal, environmental, and behavioral factors influenced each other (Bandura, 1996, 1984; Pajares, 2002). Cross (2001) discussed the various ecological influences of the macrosystem, exosystem, mesosystem, and microsystem surrounding gifted students, which contributed to identity confusion. The macrosystem was comprised of the larger environmental value systems that influenced students such as gender stereotypes, athletic values, and/or capitalistic competition. The exosystem was a connection between two or more settings such as religious affiliations, educational environments, or public media. The mesosystem was where various microsystems met, such as a person's family and school. These equated to the environmental influences in Bandura's triadic reciprocity (Bandura, 1996, 1984; Pajares, 2002).

#### *Gender Matters*

Olenchak (1999) stated that the external influences of teachers and peers had "an even greater impact on the social/emotional development of those possessing gifts that are less frequently addressed by schools" such as nontraditional talents (p. 294). The nontraditionally gifted male adolescent may have learned that he must hide this intellectual or creative side in order to be accepted into his environment (Gross, 1998).

Philip's talent in sport allowed him *to be forgiven* for being gifted intellectually – as long as he allowed his intellectual gifts to remain in the shadow of his sporting prowess. He was *expected* to show a passion for sport, but he had to conceal his deeper love of learning [*italics added*]. (Gross, 1998, p. 5)

Among the researchers of the quest for identity in gifted students was Thomas Hebert, an expert on issues associated with gifted male adolescents (2004, 2001). Through his exploration into the problems with underachievement in gifted male adolescents, he determined that the peer pressure of maintaining a masculine identity oftentimes defeated the internal passions for learning (Hebert, 2004, 2001). Referring to the more nontraditional or creative talents in these adolescents, Hebert (2004, 2001) revealed that creative writing abilities and dramatic and visually artistic talents may have been viewed by peers and authority figures as feminine traits. This "masculine mystique is the belief that vulnerability, weakness and academic success in school are signs of femininity to be avoided at all costs" (Hebert, 2004; O'Neil, 1981). Olenchak (1999) complemented this by stating that denial of capabilities became commonplace for individuals with extreme talents in any form, yet for those with nontraditional talents, the prevalence rate increased dramatically in the interests of obtaining social acceptance.

As mentioned earlier, one of the characteristics of creative talents was that the individuals possessing these talents appeared to escape the societal gender role stereotyping (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996); this left them exposed to taunting and bullying (Schuler, 2003), and thus, another contributing factor to self-denial. Self-denial, as Bandura (1994, 1986) explained, was evidence of lower self-efficacy.

In addition, the attitudes and needs typically displayed by most adolescents tended to appear much earlier in those who were intellectually gifted; this may find the teacher or parents unaware and doubt to prevail. Moreover, the intensification of this natural developmental stage may add to the feeling of alienation in the gifted child who was

typically aware that a difference already existed (Gross, 1998, pp. 2-3). It was possible for the comprehension of this difference to be absorbed as intensely positive, negative, or both which would add to the confusion (Sword, 2003).

### *Existential Precocity*

Existential intelligence was defined by Gardner (1999) as

The capacity to locate oneself with respect to the furthest reaches of the cosmos – the infinite and the infinitesimal – and the related capacity to locate oneself with respect to such existential features of the human condition as the significance of life, the meaning of death, the ultimate fate of the physical and the psychological worlds, and such profound experiences as love of another person or total immersion in a work of art... [T]here is no stipulation here of attaining an ultimate truth, any more than the deployer of musical intelligence must produce or prefer certain kinds of music. Rather, there is a species potential to engage in transcendental concerns, a capacity that can be aroused and deployed under certain circumstances. (p. 60)

In addition to Gardner (1993, 1998, 1999), Hollingworth (1942) also studied highly gifted youth and determined that the higher the intelligence quotient, the more concern for existential quandaries, such as (1) What is the meaning of life? (2) Why am I here? (3) What is my destiny? (4) Is there a God? (Gross, 1998). Although Gardner (1999) theorized that an existential intelligence existed within every person, the distinction between existential thinking and spiritual intelligence was unclear; it seemed



as though Gardner (1999) suggested that existential intelligence may be one facet to spiritual intelligence.

Encompassed in the search for identity in gifted adolescents was moral development (Gross, 1998). Gross (1998) said that this form of development appeared to evolve in conjunction with their identity at younger ages than their peers. Thus, the definition of existential precocity: the unusually advanced development or ability to consider the meaning of life, the afterlife, and transcendental concepts such as love and hope. According to Terman (1925), the scores of precocious 9-year-olds on tests of moral stability were more congruent with the average 14-year-old (Gross, 1998). In this study, its significance lay in the analysis of the selected participants' writings which are outlined in chapter four.

#### *Creative Giftedness and Emotional/Behavioral Disorders Connection*

In addition to Csikszentmihalyi's (1996) more current research, Nancy Andreason (1987) made intriguing discoveries when conducting a study on the potential link between creativity, particularly in creative writers, and schizophrenia. The results indicated no link between the two; rather, there appeared to be a strong connection between creative writers and mood disorders, especially depression (1987).

In response to her study, other researchers became interested in the link between creativity and emotional/behavioral disorders; they subsequently studied various aspects of the connection (Cross, 2001; Cross, Gust-Brey, and Ball, 2002; Olenchak, 1999; Schuler, 2003). Olenchak (1999) discovered that students with nontraditional talents (creativity, such as creative writers, visual and performing artists) seemed to develop

emotionally in unique ways. He declared that these children were at risk for failing in school and for social-emotional problems (Olenchak, 1999). He emphasized that their creative and nontraditional talents and skills were at risk for underdevelopment, and these individuals possibly may deny their talent due to the social risks involved (Olenchak, 1999). He continued with a statement on the creative student's susceptibility to self-doubt, a lack of self-worth, and to doubting self-efficacy (1999).

Kay Redfield Jamison (1996), in Carter's (1998) text, wrote on the link between creativity and manic-depressive tendencies. She indicated that writers, artists, and composers "were more likely to experience mood disorders and to commit suicide than was the general population," with poets needing the most intense therapy of all subgroups (pp. 104-5). Jamison (1996) declared that those who were creative shared characteristics with those in a manic state; these included the ability to function and work intensely while being sleep deprived, and the ability to feel depth and variety of emotions (Carter, 1998). During the manic state, productivity increased tremendously; this was in stark contrast to the deadened motivation of the depressive state (Carter, 1998).

#### Meta-Analysis: Violence in School Settings

Multiple studies conducted on violence in school settings in the past decade or more (Fairburn and Grossman, 2000; Garbarino, and deLara, 2002; Muschert, 2007; Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, and Scheidt, 2001; Sunde Peterson and Ray, 2006) illuminated the following types of violence: several forms of bullying, such as physical and verbal aggression, shoving, hitting, taunting and teasing (Sunde Peterson and Ray, 2006), hair-pulling and stealing (Bates, 2005; DeHaan, 1997); sexual

harassment and force; and shootings and knifings (Schuler, 2003). Definitions of violence included the intent of the perpetrator: that violence was done with hostility to cause distress to victims in the drive to obtain power over them (DeHaan, 1997; Sunde Peterson, and Ray, 2006).

Government agencies such as the Secret Service (Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, and Modzeleski, 2002), Federal Bureau of Investigations (O'Toole, 1999), and the Department of Education in conjunction with the National Academy of Sciences (Newman et al, 2004), focused their studies on school shootings. Others narrowed the research focus to specific genders, types of bullying, and bullying and the gifted (Schuler, 2002; Sunde Peterson and Ray, 2006). Although most of these studies centered on the potential social causes of the shootings, including peer pressures and beliefs, physical and psychological abuse, community values, gun availability and acceptance, violent computer game participation, parental involvement and beliefs, socioeconomics, and academic environment (Newman et al, 2004; Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2007), some attended strictly to discipline problems (Heaviside, Rowan, Williams, and Farris, 1998; Skiba, 2000).

Although gun availability was blamed by many in the wake of these shootings, several who reported this blame also posited the quandary that I pose as well: what about the decision to use them? Regardless of whether or not they were available, a choice had to be made to use them; a gun does not have the power to cause a rampage shooting (Urso Spina, 2000).



Several studies also expounded upon the media violence associated with these cases (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2007; Newman et al, 2004, NRCIMNA, 2003). The empirical evidence was dichotomous with this: scientific evidence supporting this argument was lacking, yet the Psychological Science in the Public Interest authors (2004) stated that violent television and films, video games, and music increased the likelihood of aggressive and violent behaviors, thoughts, and emotions.

Regarding cyberabuse, again, the research led to a dichotomy, albeit more slight in nature. Through the increase of email, blogs, and cell phone text messaging, additional streams for verbal and psychological bullying to occur were created (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2007). Additionally, some of the research indicated that it definitively led to more violence and aggression; yet, other research stated that this increase in violence and aggression was minimal (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2007). That said, we could conclude that there was a positive correlation between cyberabuse and subsequent violent and aggressive thoughts and actions, yet the extent of which remain unknown. However, I still pose the query from another perspective: "So far, most of the conversation ... has reflected a desire to understand what the media are doing to our children. Instead, we should be focusing our attention on understanding what our children are doing with media" (Jenkins, 1999, as cited in Levine, 2000, p. 8). Brooks Brown (Brown & Merritt, 2002) concurred with this,

I won't dispute the idea that some of the elements of their plan [for the Columbine shootings] were derived from video games. What I disagree with is the notion that video games *caused* the shootings – as well as most of the rest of the violence that

takes place in America... Video games may have given them a place to direct their rage – but something else caused their rage in the first place. (pp. 38-9)

### *Bullying & the Gifted*

In the research, bullying was described as harmful or disturbing behaviors repeatedly demonstrated over time by people perceived as being more powerful over those perceived as being less powerful (Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, and Scheidt, 2001, p. 294). Sunde Peterson and Ray (2006) explored how bullying affected gifted students in selected schools for the gifted. The G/T students were classified as victims, perpetrators, and both victims and perpetrators. They queried gifted 8<sup>th</sup> graders (N=432) regarding the frequency and types of bullying they experienced in each of the roles previously listed. These authors characterized bullying behaviors as proactive or reactive aggression (Boxworth, Espelage, & Simon, 1999), and/or direct or indirect attacks (Olweus, 1991). *Proactive* aggression was described as behavior associated with actively seeking out social status through bullying, while *reactive* aggression was typically associated with anger (Bosworth et al, 1999), an emotion felt in response to some event. To complement this, *direct* aggression equated to “open attacks” on victims; *indirect* aggression was associated with exclusion from people, and nonselection for participation in social groups (Olweus, 1991).

The results of this study indicated that bullying tended to increase for male students during times of transition to new environments where social structures would change, such as in middle school. This increased aggression tended to decrease over time as the dominance hierarchy was put in place (Sunde Peterson & Ray, 2006).



Importantly, the ways by which the G/T students were bullied as reported *by* them were especially startling. Among the highest ranking forms of bullying of these students was name calling (35%) and teasing (24%). These were further subcategorized into the following: for appearance (41%); for intellectual capability (36%); for sexual insinuations such as *gay*, *fag*, *slut* (8%); and for personality (6%) (Sunde Peterson & Ray, 2006). Both name calling and teasing peaked in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade; yet, the sexual insinuations form of both peaked in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades.

Also discovered in their study was that there was a progressive increase in negative bullying behaviors *by* the G/T children between Kindergarten and 8<sup>th</sup> grades. In Kindergarten, 4% of the G/T participants had reported calling people names; this increased to 14% in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Interesting to note was that those G/T students who were bullying victims in the elementary years were bullied less by the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Additionally, threats made by G/T children increased between 1<sup>st</sup> grade and 8<sup>th</sup> grade; teasing for appearance done by G/T students increased between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades; and hitting by G/T students increased slightly as well between 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grades. These findings may suggest that although the bullying of G/T children may decrease as grade progress, their own bullying behaviors increased. In essence, those who experienced bullying in the elementary years may become the bullies in subsequent years (Sunde Peterson, and Ray, 2006).

Moreover, the G/T children utilized more kinds of bullying by the time they entered into the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. In fact, 19% of the G/T male participants reported they had committed some sort of violent deed by this grade, and 37% of the G/T male participants



reported they had violent thoughts by the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The statistically significant finding for the study conducted by Sunde Peterson and Ray (2006) was that gifted males were more likely to bully ( $p < .05$ ), be bullied ( $p < .05$ ), think violently ( $p < .02$ ), and act violently at school ( $p < .001$ ).

Finally, through the study emerged questions concerning the mental health of gifted children in early adolescence. The distress felt by these students who were bullied, the worries and anxieties of the G/T students who bullied and were victims of bullying may have affected their *perceptions* of school, the academic performance of themselves and others, and their perception of self-confidence. Hence, self-efficacy of G/T students during early adolescence should be of great concern to educators and parents. "If the literature attesting to a relationship between giftedness and emotional intensity and sensitivity is accurate, G/T children and early adolescents might be somewhat uniquely affected by bullying" (Sunde Peterson, and Ray, 2006, p. 161). These authors furthered this by stating that social skills curriculum should be in place that will educate the bullies as well as the bullied in how to deal with problems in an effective and appropriate way (2006). The high percentage of gifted victims and bullies are in stark contrast to research in the literature about the low scholastic competence of both bullies and their victims (Mynard and Joseph, 1997 as cited in Sunde Peterson and Ray, 2006).

#### *Similarities & Categories*

The purpose of the literature review was to conduct a *meta-analysis* of the research completed by the aforementioned organizations for commonalities and discrepancies in the school rampage shootings. The study conducted by the National

Research Council Institute of Medicine of the National Academies (NRCIMNA, 2003), published as the book *Deadly Lessons*, focused almost exclusively on the rampage shootings and other violence in schools (e.g., gangs, bullying) with the intent to develop some form of profile for the shooters. Newman et al (2004) authored a study focused exclusively on social causes of the rampage shootings; it was published as the book *Rampage: The Social Roots of School Shootings*. Historically, school shootings were perceived as local problems prior to 1997; it was not until the “wave” of rampage shootings between the years of 1997-1999 that they were viewed as social problems (Muschert, 2007).

*Similarity 1.* In each of the studies conducted on the rampage shooters, it was apparent that every perpetrator was male in the early, middle, or late stages of adolescence (NRCIMNA, 2003; Newman et al, 2004).

*Similarity 2.* All but one of the shooters were reported to either have intelligence quotients (I.Q.) at or above 120, a score within two standard deviations above the mean, or be described as bright and above average in academics (Newman et al, 2004). Although I.Q. tests are thought to be limited in measuring some talents, and more contemporary assessments may allow for alternative abilities to be measured, a high I.Q. score continues to be a positive sign of intellectual giftedness (Ruf, 2005).

*Similarity 3.* The analyses conducted by the NRCIMNA (2003) and Newman et al (2004) also found similarities between their community settings, the societal values, the values of their academic environment, the shooters’ mental health, and the shooters’ perceptions of such (NRCIMNA, 2003; Newman et al, 2004). As stated by the



Constitutional Rights Foundation (CRF, 2007), the nature of friends' behaviors, family relationships, and students' school performance tended to have more powerful influence on adolescents' attitudes and behaviors than socioeconomics and multicultural factors.

The communities appeared to be thriving middle-to-upper-class rural and/or suburban areas that had recently undergone rapid industrial transformation and growth (Newman et al, 2004; NRCIMNA, 2003). One study included further discussion regarding the contributions this fact may have had on feelings of instability (NRCIMNA, 2003). The authors of the Constitutional Rights Foundation (CRF) confidently stated that school violence has been linked to the transformation of communities, specifically on school size, racial and ethnic diversity, and socioeconomic status of the students (CRF, 2007). They furthered this by stating that when adolescents begin middle school, it may be their first chance to have experiences with people from other cultures and backgrounds and they may not have fully developed social skills to deal with these new experiences. Hence, they may be causal factors in why middle schools were two times more likely to host or be affected by violence (CRF, 2007).

Regarding the communities' values, the reports indicated that crime and violence were nearly nonexistent (Newman et al, 2004; NRCIMNA, 2003). However, the schools involved in the shootings were said to have neglected disciplining athletes for bullying; the authors furthered this by stating that definitive social peer groups were evident (Newman et al, 2004). Interestingly, the Constitutional Rights Foundation study (2007) of several communities involved with school shootings reported that 50% of all teenagers, regardless of whether they were from rural, suburban, or urban environments, said their



schools were becoming more violent. Both the NRCIMNA (2003) and the Newman et al (2004) studies offered excerpts from some of the shooters' journals and interviews which stated their hatred for the "jocks" because of their persistent bullying. These facts were verified by Brown (and Merritt, 2002), who was a friend to Eric Harris at Columbine High School. Thus, although the communities were perceived as having little to no crime and/or violence by community members and the researchers, the microsystem of the academic environment was perceived by the shooters and their peers to have contrasted with this belief.

In addition, a comparison of the inner city and rural/suburban community responses to gun attacks was conducted by the NRCIMNA (2003). Their findings indicated that the inner city communities not only added security and communication measures in response to the violence, but they also performed measures to improve the community climate. In contrast to this, the suburban/rural communities where the rampage shootings occurred enabled new communication and security measures, but blame was placed on "troubled youth" rather than on the community as a whole taking a share. Hence, no measures were implemented to improve community climate (2003). According to the Constitutional Rights Foundation (2007), when the community environment neglects children by not responding to their needs, it can lead to violence.

*Similarity 4.* The results of the NRCIMNA (2003) study declared that the attacks were committed by the perpetrators because of "more general" and/or "abstract" grievances. These grievances included the *feeling* of being attacked by others rather than by any one specific threat from a single individual. It said that the shooters' grievances

were not understood by surrounding people to be as bad as the shooters perceived them to be; they felt that the shooters' perceptions were exaggerated. However, to the shooters, their environments may, in fact, have been exactly how they perceived them to be – it may have been *their perception* of truth. To review, the community members perceived the community to be less violent than the shooters and their peers perceived it to be; and the shooters' peers perceived the school climate to be less violent than the shooters perceived it to be.

*Similarity 5.* All the aforementioned studies stated that most of the shooters had some form of mental health issue, e.g., personality disorder, AD/HD, depression, or schizophrenia (NRCIMNA, 2003; Newman et al, 2004). Interestingly, the depression and schizophrenia were often left undiagnosed until *after* the incidents occurred (Newman et al, 2004). Although these mental health issues have been linked to distorted perceptions in prior research, it would be presumptuous at this time to assume that the retrospective diagnoses were definitive and that the shooters' perceptions were in fact distorted.

In the Newman et al (2004) cross-case meta-analysis of school shooters (N=27) that included rampage shooters, which combined data gathered by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Secret Service, and media reports, approximately one-third (34%) of the shooters had been psychologically evaluated prior to their violent attacks; half of these (17%) were diagnosed with a mental health issue. Following the attacks, however, 52% of all shooters in the study were diagnosed as having mental health issues (Newman et al, 2004). The researchers cautioned readers about these figures due to the degree of difficulty confronted by the psychologists hired by the defense and



prosecution in retrospective diagnosing which involved post-mortem evaluations (also known as “psychological autopsies”).

The same meta-analysis continued with figures regarding depression and suicidality. The Secret Service data included in the Newman et al (2004) figures indicated that 78% of the shooters were suicidal prior to the events, while the media noted that 74% of the shooters were both suicidal and depressed prior to their actions. Interesting to note was the CDC’s data that indicated only 37% of the shooters were suicidal prior to, during, and/or after the events. The Secret Service data in the Newman et al analysis declared that although the majority of school shooters had not been evaluated, 80% “had a history of suicide attempts or suicidal thoughts before they opened fire” (2004, p. 244). Newman et al (2004) offered that the combination of depression, suicidal tendencies, and the feeling of instability may “impair a boy’s ability to accurately perceive his social position” (p. 244).

*Similarity 6.* Although the shooters appeared to perceive themselves as loners, and the researchers entitled them as “marginalized” students, there was evidence to the contrary (NRCIMNA, 2003; Newman et al, 2004). Most had others with whom they spent time; these tended to be marginalized people as well (NRCIMNA, 2003). Some of the groups of friends had titles such as the “Goths,” (NRCIMNA, 2003) and the “Trench Coat Mafia” (Newman et al, 2004). These facts were verified by Brooks Brown when he discussed how their group of friends, which included Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, bonded between their freshman and sophomore years at Columbine High School (Brown



& Merritt, 2002). This begs the question of whether they lacked meaningful connections with these people in order to perceive them as friends.

### *Academic Environment*

As stated previously, understanding the academic environment and its values was essential in trying to comprehend why the shooters chose to direct their attacks on school grounds. The academic environment consisted of several facets as well: the students, teachers, administration, curriculum, instructional methods, organizational structure, and the values of each. The following are the categories derived from the academic environment in the meta-analysis.

#### *Category 1: Gender Matters*

A repeating category throughout the literature on rampage shootings was gender. Although not discussed in depth by any of the aforementioned studies, the publication edited by Urso Spina (2000) entitled *Smoke and Mirrors: The Hidden Context of Violence in Schools and Society*, elaborated extensively on this issue. In addition, Brooks Brown (Brown & Merritt, 2002), served as verification of several points illuminated by Urso Spina (2000).

The obvious ingredient in the gender category was that all of the shooters were male (Urso Spina, 2000; NRCIMNA, 2003; Newman et al, 2004). However, "gay-bashing," and masculine expectations, as Klein and Chancer (in Urso Spina, 2000, p. 129) boldly stated, played a larger part of the gender category; they felt that these were to blame for the rampage shootings. They stated that Michael Carneal said "he was tired of being called a 'faggot'" (p. 130). Mitchell Johnson was reported as vowing to, "kill all

the girls who had broken up with him” (p. 130). Kipland Kinkel was reported as explaining his violent actions by wanting to “kill... ‘jocks’ who tormented him for being ‘small’” (p. 129).

Perhaps the most telling of this category were the comments made by Luke Woodham and Eric Harris in their journals. Woodham was reported as stating he was tired of being called “gay” (Urso Spina, 2000, p. 130). Harris’ diary was reported by these same authors as displaying the same “rage” that Woodham emanated when he wrote of the “ridicule by ‘preps and jocks’ who called him ‘homosexual’” (2000, p. 130). Brooks Brown (2002) furthered this with the following: “Such things were commonplace at Columbine. If a guy was acting in the Columbine drama program, he was immediately labeled a ‘drama fag’” (p. 61).

#### *Category 2: Valuing Athletics & De-valuing Intellectual and Creative Abilities*

Another recurring category in this meta-analysis was the value of masculine athleticism and the de-valuing of intellectual and creative domains.

Not only was he not playing sports – which was what all normal guys were supposed to do at Columbine – but *he was into that fine arts crap!*

The bullies found whatever weakness they could and went after it. I was a wuss because I wasn’t in sports. I was gay because I liked theatre. Then when I was in debate, it was like, “Ooh, you must be smart, huh huh huh.” Apparently, they thought calling someone “smart” was an insult. (Brown & Merritt, 2002, p. 61)

In addition, the athletes who were involved in the bullying of the perpetrators were often denied their punishment (Brown & Merritt, 2002; Newman et al, 2004). Brooks Brown (Brown & Merritt, 2002) added that several faculty members and administrative staff were sports coaches as well.

### *Category 3: Image and Competition*

Although several students participated in gifted and talented programs throughout their academic careers, it was reported that the hidden curriculum was of a competitive nature. In the case of Dylan Klebold, he attended a school-within-a-school that was filled with intense competition due to political influences. In the case of Kip Kinkel, he was diagnosed with a learning disability and was therefore looked upon as “less” than the others in the talented and gifted program.

Some students wanted to improve their image so badly that they enacted their plans that were laced with imaginings of what people would say after they were gone. They held themselves in great anticipation to take others by surprise during a weak moment.

### *Category 4: Power and Control*

In the academic environment, power appeared to surface on several levels. First, the athletes who seemed to be popular with some other peers gained power or control when the administration and teachers looked the other way from their bullying behavior. In addition, the hierarchy of power was reinforced when the entire school environment devalued intellectual and creative potentials. In the case of Kip Kinkel, he wanted to have power over others without taking responsibility for his actions. He evidenced this when



he wrote of the voices inside his head that were driving him to kill. He wanted control over the voices. He also described to classmates his weekend killings of animals in the woods surrounding his country home; this was indicative of his desire to control by killing a nearly powerless animal for the fun of it.

Regarding Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, Eric wrote more of his desires to control others when he literally wrote of his wishes to become God so that all others would be beneath him. Dylan journaled that he did not want to be the athletes he hated so much, rather, he wanted the happiness they seemed to have; therefore, he chose to get rid of them. This was taking control of the situation. The two boys took control of their situation and their peers when they shot the students at Columbine High School, yet they gave up control of their lives when they chose to take their own.

T.J. did not seem to have control of any aspect of his life. His favorite pastimes and interests were not allowed in the house; his parents even testified to their attempts to motivate T.J. to do what they wanted him to do. The carrot they dangled in front of him was allowing T.J. to get his driver's license. They had not considered that T.J. did not want the license in the first place. Moreover, his friends were chosen by his parents, and his parents insisted on chaperoning his every move. In his shooting, I believe it to have been a cry for someone to help him take control. He knew how to shoot from all of their family hunting excursions, yet when he opened fire on the student body, he did not aim to kill anyone but possibly himself. This indicated that although he had the capability of shooting to kill the others, he controlled his behavior enough to injure a few, then gave up control to be arrested by the authorities.

The behaviors these students displayed in shooting others in their schools were the epitome of either taking control, or giving up control of the situation. Some either wanted to show their perceived intellectual and existential superiority. Still others were desperate for someone to pay attention to their needs; they therefore gave up the hope of their own power to gain much needed attention.

#### Summary of Categories

The de-valuing of intellectualization and the over-valuing of athletics in schools may have contributed to the frustrations felt by several of the students involved in the rampage shootings. In addition, political competition and traditional academic environments have proved to be negative influences on creative and high ability learners when students are judged rather than their actions.

At a sensitive time in a male's life when bodies are changing, the community is expanding, and the academic environment changes to suit the hierarchy of dominance, adolescence may have presented extensive difficulties in the personal perceptions of these students. Relationships were somehow altered and may have affected the social, academic, and familial environments surrounding these individuals. All these factors may have affected how they perceived themselves.

All of the students were reported to complain about being called sexual names such as faggot and gay, and their female friends were in turn called Nazi lesbians. These sexually charged names may have contributed to their desire to take control of the situation and restore their image. All of the aforementioned categories have been directly

linked to research findings as being contributors for distorting perception, especially of the self.



## CHAPTER 3

### CASE STUDIES

In this chapter I explain the methods employed for the case studies involving the shootings by Kip Kinkel, Eric Harris, Dylan Klebold, and T.J. Solomon. The case studies for Kip Kinkel in Springfield, Oregon, and Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold in Littleton, Colorado, are in similar formats. The case study for T.J. Solomon is in a modified format to maintain the order in which the psychological evaluations were completed. The results from the multiple evaluations may have impacted the events of that day. Thus, his case study is in a different pattern from the other two cases.

#### Methodology

The following case studies of the shootings in Thurston High School in Springfield, Oregon, Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, and Heritage High School in Conyers, Georgia, were supported by multiple sources that may solicit clarification. Due to the colossal media coverage of each school shooting, many speculations surfaced over the past ten years that could have affected objectivity in a negative way. With the intention of obtaining as much accuracy possible of these horrible crimes, I sought *authentic* artifacts of those who were closest to the students who committed them, and to the crime scene investigation proceeding them. Several sources were garnered from the district attorneys' offices that archived evidence and courtroom transcriptions from these cases which they prosecuted. Other sources were discovered

through divergent research on the cases. At the beginning of each case study, I offer a brief explanation of the sources I collected to substantiate the stories.

### *Participant & Timeline Selection*

I selected participants for this analysis on the basis of whether or not I could obtain authentic documents. I also needed to select studies that would fit into the time constraints involved with this process. Additionally, security for my family was of utmost importance; therefore, I chose not to include the Jonesboro shootings, since those boys were released from prison and would need to grant permission for me to obtain their information. This would involve disclosure of personal information which would potentially leave my family vulnerable.

I chose a timeline of approximately ten years into the past for this historiological study. This seemed to narrow the focus down to a certain number of rampages that could have involved potential negative cases, i.e., copycat shootings. In the initial stages of participant selection, I hypothesized that the T.J. Solomon shooting would be a negative case. However, my analysis was inconclusive.

### *On Qualitative Research in Creating the Case Studies*

There are five overriding methodological characteristics associated with historiological research. They are: (1) the topic being explored is one of past events; (2) the majority of information sources are primary, i.e., manuscripts, testimonies, published or unpublished letters or diaries, or journals; (3) rigorous criticism techniques are applied, including intrinsic and extrinsic criticisms, to ensure trustworthiness of the information gleaned from the sources; (4) interpretation may be given on the potential causes of the event(s), specifics surrounding the era of the event(s), and specifics that leave little or no



questions unanswered within the context of the study, but that may leave many questions unanswered outside of it (Barzun & Graft, 1985, cited in McMillian & Schumacher, 1997); and (5) multiple forms of analyses can be applied (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2005; McMillian & Schumacher, 1997; Wiersma & Jurs, 2005).

*Case Studies as Past Events.* I chose a timeline of approximately ten years into the past for this historiological study. I wanted to illustrate a time in history that was approximately one decade into the past as it seemed a natural bracket of time to revisit. In addition, it serendipitously represented a large increase in the number of rampage shootings across America (McClellan, 2005).

*Primary and Secondary Sources of Information, and Internal and External Criticism.* I was able to find primary sources for each of the chosen case studies. According to McMillian and Schumacher (1997), Gall, Gall, and Borg (2005), and Wiersma and Jurs (2005), finding primary sources for evidence and illustration of past events was preferable; however, secondary sources are acceptable as long as internal and external criticism was applied. I applied these criticisms to each source I collected, and this criticism served as a means by which to exclude artifacts. Internal and external criticism presented itself in the form of my questioning the legitimacy of the relationship between Brooks Brown and Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold – perhaps Brooks (Brown & Merritt, 2002) co-wrote his book with the intent of seeking some form of revenge against the two other boys since he was accused by investigators of playing a role in the events of the Columbine shootings. After all, he was warned by Eric to leave the premises right before the attack happened, and Brooks *did* leave. I continued the criticism of this source



by asking why Brooks would want to write his book; what were his intentions? What would he gain from this? In the end, I included his book throughout the case study on Columbine since I determined his intent to be one of a need to express his innocence, and because the situations he wrote about in his book were verifiable with other primary evidentiary documents I obtained from the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department. These documents included the writings of Dylan and Eric where names were blacked out to protect privacy, and documentation of the timeline one year prior to the shootings, which verified how each event outside of school (steeling from the van; Eric taking medication) may have caused or affected certain behaviors in school.

Regarding the Kip Kinkel case study, I applied these internal and external criticisms to each source as well; however, I was limited on the choices of sources. I questioned the reliability of the information presented on the *Frontline* documentary (PBS, 2000) by asking how authentic it was. I discovered that Kip's journal writings had been scanned into the online version of the documentary, which I subsequently accepted as a variant of a primary source (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2005). Additionally, this documentary included audiotaped interviews with Kip's sister, and the audiotaped confession of Kip immediately after his arrest. Although finding these more primary sources of information from Kip via a secondary source was not preferable, I employed them due to the several other criteria they met (e.g., within the chosen timeline, within the same increase in rampage shootings, surface level similarities to other cases chosen, and availability of authentic evidence).

T.J. Solomon's case was developed on the reliance to testimonies of his parents, psychologists, and witnesses involved in the events of his shootings. Authentic videotapes of his psychological evaluation by the prosecution were made available to me, as were several handwritten sets of lyrics he authored. I applied internal criticism to these lyrics by asking if they were indicative of his own thinking and belief systems, or if they were simply creatively written words simply penned to pass the time. When I sought the answers to these questions, I found that T.J. repeatedly stated that he loved to write them and to download and print lyrics from his favorite rap artists because it helped him *express himself*. Therefore, my analysis may appear to readers as my equating the meaning of his lyrical writing to his own thoughts. I believe it to be possible, but I strongly caution readers that believing it to be the complete truth would be a serious injustice for T.J.

*Interpretations that May or May Not Leave Questions.* Naturally, after reading the following case studies, readers would continue to question why the shooters chose to do the actions they did. This study will not serve to answer that in full; however, this study *may* begin the process of answering that question by understanding their motivations through their interests and strengths. In the detailed descriptions of the shooters' actions prior to, during, and after (where possible), my intent was to illuminate what the actual events were of those days to the best of my ability by utilizing investigative documents and authentic videotapes and audiotapes. My intent was to leave very little or no questions in the minds of the readers (including myself) regarding what steps happened at

the shootings; therefore, timelines testified to or presented by investigators were heeded in my descriptions.

Moreover, the historiological methods of this study were specifically chosen to complement the mixed methods and quantitative methods chosen by prior researchers on the study of rampage shootings. In essence, this study served as another rotation on the cyclical process of qualitative research (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2005; McMillian & Schumacher, 1997; Wiersma & Jurs, 2005).

*Multiple Forms of Analysis.* The form of analysis in this chapter is termed as a descriptive narration (McMillian & Schumacher, 1997). In chapter two, I employed a meta-analysis, which analyzes quantitative materials (e.g., scholarly studies) (Gall, Gall, and Borg, 2005; McMillian & Schumacher, 1997). In subsequent chapters, I utilize comparative analysis that “qualitatively compares similarities and differences of the event to other events... searching for trends or uniqueness” (McMillian & Schumacher, 1997, p. 5). In addition, I employ interpretive analysis in diagnosing the boys with or without intellectual and/or creative giftedness, and with the discussion of the categories and themes and the assertion derived from prior analyses (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2005; McMillian & Schumacher, 1997).

#### Case Studies

Learning to envision scenes as vivid, detailed writing on a page is as much a commitment to a lively descriptive style of writing as it is to an intellectual honesty in recording events fully and accurately...



As a writing strategy, description calls for concrete details rather than abstract generalizations, for sensory imagery rather than evaluative labels, and for immediacy through details presented at close range... details present color, shape, and size to create visual images; other details of sound, timbre, loudness, and volume evoke auditory images; those details describing smell or fragrance recreate olfactory images; and details portraying gestures, movements, posture, and facial expression convey kinetic images. (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 1998, pp. 68-69)

*Kipland Kinkel: Thurston High School, May 21, 1998*

*Briefing on Sources Used for this Case Study*

Although the media sources were prevalent for this case, I sought more authentic artifacts from the district attorney's office in Eugene, Oregon. The attorney was unable to contribute the manpower to go through the many boxes of evidence and documentation from this case; however, he invited me to travel to Oregon to go through them myself. He also offered the opportunity for me to interview Kip Kinkel in the prison to which he was recently transferred. Excited about the opportunity, I sought many potential funding outlets. Unfortunately, I was unable to secure the funding for the trip, and was left to find secondary sources. The PBS channel had televised a documentary on their popular show *Frontline* (2000), and its transcriptions were available online from the PBS website. I downloaded these transcriptions that included several excerpts of Kip's journal writings, his confession, and his suicide note. I compared this with the information on the personal aspects of Kip written in the published studies and books on rampage shootings for verification. Except where noted, this documentary served as the main source for the

information in this case study. These books included *Deadly Lessons: Understanding Lethal School Violence* (NRCIMNA, 2003), *Rampage: The Social Roots of School Violence* (Newman et al, 2004), and *Failure to Hold: The Politics of School Violence* (Webber, 2003).

To create the backdrop of the town, I enlisted the help of the Springfield Chamber of Commerce website. The images depicted on this site made it a joy to recreate them in this study. This is not an exhaustive list of sources utilized to triangulate the following case study.

#### *Background Information*

The trickling sounds of the McKenzie and Willamette Rivers could be enjoyed from the quaint tables just adjacent to the wrought iron picket fence that lined their banks. Springfield, Oregon, flanked on the north and south by these two rivers, was home to approximately 55,000 residents in 1998. Its neighboring sister-city, Eugene, hosted the University of Oregon. The Cascade Mountain Range lay one hour east of Springfield, and the Pacific Ocean lay one hour west. Described as picturesque with mossy hills and misting rocky hillsides, it boasted a heritage that dated back to the pioneer times (Springfield Chamber of Commerce, 2008).

The town of Springfield had undergone some economic transformation in recent years; Sony had built a new plant for microchips, and suburban-style homes were being built in increasing numbers. I would describe it as a naturalist's haven away from the busy-ness of Eugene. Hunting, fishing, and rafting were typical pastimes for residents of Springfield.

Kipland Kinkel, a 14-year-old boy who attended Thurston High School, was one of Springfield's residents. He enjoyed football, and much to his joy, was invited to try out for the school team during his freshman year . Kip was the second child of Bill and Faith Kinkel, two Spanish teachers in the Springfield School District . His older sister Kristin, who was away at college in Hawaii on a cheerleading scholarship at the time of the shooting incident, was described as being a successful student, one who made her parents beam with pride.

### *Kip Kinkel*

Kip Kinkel was of a slight build. He adorned a worried expression on his narrowed face in most pictures. His reddish-brown hair was cut short in length atop the ears and in back, with the top groomed forward. His cheeks featured sporadic moles that were in stark contrast to his pale skin. He was described by his classmates and friends as a skinny class clown of sorts, yet with a twisted sense of humor (Green and Filips, 1998). He was often heard making jokes about the animals he killed in the woods surrounding his country home.

As a young child about to enter his first year of school, Kip's parents chose to take a one-year sabbatical from their Spanish teaching positions to travel in Spain with their two children. Although Kip's older sister was supposed to be in 5<sup>th</sup> grade that year, they placed her into the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade with an English speaking instructor. Kip's teacher only spoke Spanish, and it was reported that he struggled significantly.

Upon their return to Oregon, Kip entered the 1<sup>st</sup> grade; again, he struggled. According to his sister's statements in an interview, Kip displayed maturity issues, and



appeared to have some physical and emotional delays; these were not detailed in her interview. Kip's parents and teacher decided it would be best for him to repeat the 1<sup>st</sup> grade.

Once in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, Kip emitted no behavioral issues, yet he displayed extreme frustration with writing. Other difficulties included reading and spelling. Bill and Faith Kinkel requested that Kip be assessed for special education services. Due to his score being above the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile on the intelligence test, and an *average* rating on a neurological test, Kip did not qualify for special education services. His teacher remained concerned about his lack of motor skill in one hand, and his level of difficulty in spelling even his own last name. The teacher stated that Kip emitted an unusually high degree of frustration and anxiety, but he worked quite diligently on assigned tasks.

Kip was reassessed for special education services when he was in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade; the results indicated his qualification for specialized programming. While he labored over reading, writing, and spelling, Kip excelled in math and science. He received an award at the end of the school year for improvement in reading, and for his strong efforts to overcome frustration. Additionally, the teacher reported his positive behavior in class. That year, Kip earned As and Bs in all areas – a trend that continued through his middle school years.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Kip was diagnosed with a learning disability. Special education services continued as in the past year; however, he was simultaneously placed into the Talented and Gifted program (TAG) due to "his above-average performance in science and math." Kip continued his participation in the TAG program through 8<sup>th</sup> grade; he was

considered young for this grade placement at the age of 14 even with the repeat of 1<sup>st</sup> grade.

#### *Significant Events Prior to the Shooting*

Between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades, Kip was involved with a series of incidents that found him in precarious situations. While Kip was in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, his sister moved away from home to attend college in Hawaii. After her move, Kip and his friends were caught ordering books at school on how to build bombs. Kip's mother became concerned about the influence his friendships were having on him.

Kip was in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade in 1996-97, and was caught shoplifting CDs at Target. That same year, he bought a sawed-off shotgun from a friend that he hid in his room without parental knowledge. His parents were aware of his growing interest in guns and explosives.

By January of this same school year, Kip attended a snowboarding clinic with a friend in Bend, Oregon. The two boys elected to pitch rocks off of a highway overpass, one of which hit a car below. An officer caught Kip's friend at the overpass, but found that Kip had made his way back to the motel somehow. As soon as the officer arrived to arrest him, he immediately asked through tears if anyone was hurt. Both the boys were charged for the crime, and were referred to the Department of Youth Services in Eugene.

Faith Kinkel's growing concern for her son led her to psychologist Dr. Hicks only two weeks after the rock throwing incident. The time spent with Dr. Hicks came after a series of events and behaviors that became concerning to Kip's parents. Mrs. Kinkel disclosed her grave concerns about Kip's temper and "extreme interest in guns, knives,

and explosives” to the psychologist . In addition, she felt that Kip was possibly a danger to himself and others; and she held concerns about his relationship with his father .

According to Kip in this first meeting with Dr. Hicks on January 20, 1997, he tearfully described the relationship with his father as one where his father expected the worst of him: that he was a bad kid who did bad things; and that his father did not believe in him. In contrast, Kip described the relationship with his mother as one in which she perceived him as a good kid who did bad things at times.

Dr. Hicks diagnosed Kip with Major Depressive Disorder during this time. In subsequent meetings, Dr. Hicks reported in his notes Kip’s improvement in temper combined with continued depressive episodes; there was also a continued interest in explosives.

In April of that year, Kip earned a two-day suspension from school for kicking another student in the head. Kip claimed that his efforts were in response to the other boy shoving him, and expressed anger in reference to the instigator’s lack of punishment. Days later, Kip earned a three-day suspension apparently for throwing a pencil at another student.

It was not until June, 1997, that Dr. Hicks recommended a course of the medication Prozac for Kip’s depression. Although his behaviors were improving, Kip was becoming more cynical, was eating less, and was feeling bored and irritable. Kip’s physician concurred with the psychologist’s recommendation. While on medication, Kip’s parents reported that his depression was less, and his temper outbursts had stopped.



After only 21 days on a medication that seemed to improve Kip's behaviors and emotions, and at Kip's persistent requests, Bill Kinkel chaperoned his son's purchase of a 9mm Glock. The stipulations were that the gun would not be in Kip's full possession until he turned 21 years of age, and that it would never be used without the father's supervision.

By the end of July 1997 the psychologist and Kip's parents agreed to end the regular meetings between Kip and Dr. Hicks; however, his medication continued. Unbeknownst to them, Kip purchased and hid another .22 pistol from a friend that same summer.

Upon entering the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, Kip appeared less depressed to friends and family. His father asked the football coach at Thurston High School to call Kip and invite him to try out for the football team. Kip's future seemed more hopeful and bright.

During the early fall of his 9<sup>th</sup> grade year, Kip discontinued the Prozac after a three month course. He bought yet another Ruger .22 semiautomatic rifle with his father's approval. As with the first .22 Glock, the stipulations were that he would not use it without his father being present, and he could not take full possession of the gun until he was 21 years old.

Nearing the end of September 1997, Kip articulated in speech class how to make a bomb. His visual aides were detailed drawings of explosives. It was reported that teachers and peers were not alarmed by this topic as another student gave a speech on how to join the Church of Satan.

Between October 1997 and March 1998 of Kip's freshman year, the first three of the notorious rampage shootings occurred: Luke Woodham's shootings in Pearl, Mississippi; Michael Carneal's shootings in West Paducah, Kentucky; and Mitchell Johnson's and Andrew Golden's shootings in Jonesboro, Arkansas. A friend of Kip's testified that he and Kip thought the Jonesboro incident was "pretty cool".

Prior to the school shootings, two more events took place in May of Kip's freshman year of school. Kip slept over at Tony McCown's house; they had plans to meet several other friends at midnight to toilet paper a house. They saved up over 400 rolls of toilet paper for this event over the course of several weeks. Their goal was to beat the school record for number of rolls of toilet paper used in one "tp" excursion; they beat the record, but they also got caught.

On May 19, 1998, Kip's friend Korey Ewert stole a .32 pistol from Scott Keeney, the father of a mutual friend. Kip and Korey made arrangements for Kip to purchase it at school the next day for \$110.

*May 20, 1998*

At 8:00 am, on May 20, 1998, Kip entered Thurston High School with \$110 in cash. He purchased the Beretta semiautomatic pistol fully loaded with a 9-round clip from Korey as planned, placed it in a paper sack, and hid it in his locker. At an undisclosed time that morning, Mr. Keeney discovered his gun was missing; he then phoned the school to report his suspicions of students who could have been involved in the theft. Kip was left unnamed.

Word of mouth traveled quickly that morning. By 9:15 am, Detective Warthen was informed by students that the stolen Beretta was in Kip's possession. The detective subsequently pulled Kip out of study hall and explained the reason for his presence. Kip readily admitted to having the gun in his locker, and both he and Korey were arrested (Webber, 2003). Moreover, Kip was expelled from school for this incident (Webber, 2003). It was unclear whether Kip knew the gun he purchased from Korey that morning was stolen.

It was nearly 11:30 am when Kip arrived at the police station. He was charged with "possession of a firearm in a public building and the felony charge of receiving a stolen weapon". Bill Kinkel collected Kip from the station and brought him home (PBS, 2000; Webber, 2003). Detective Warthen claimed that Kip was very worried about what was going to happen to him, and about what his parents would think (PBS, 2000; Webber, 2003).

Between 2:00 and 3:00 pm, Bill Kinkel received two phone calls. The first was from a family friend, Richard Bushnell, who called to discuss the day's events involving Kip (PBS, 2000; Webber 2003). Bushnell was also Kip's academic adviser; it was reported the he and Bill conversed about the possibility of enrolling Kip in the National Guard's program for troubled juveniles (CNN, 1998). The second call was from Scott Keeney, the man whose gun had been stolen then sold to Kip. PBS (2000) reported that Bill told Keeney of his insecurities regarding what to do with Kip at that point (Webber, 2003). It was unclear whether Kip overheard these conversations.



At approximately 3:00 pm, Bill Kinkel was situated at the kitchen counter drinking a cup of coffee (PBS, 2000; Webber, 2003). Kip seized the .22 rifle from his room, snatched ammunition from his parents' bedroom, and descended the staircase to make haste toward the kitchen (PBS, 2000; Webber, 2003). From behind his father, he extended the rifle aiming directly at his father's head, then fired a single shot; his father collapsed overtop the counter. Kip dragged his father's body from the kitchen into the bathroom, then covered it with a sheet (PBS, 2000; Webber, 2003). When asked during his confession why he moved his father's body, he stated, "I moved him because... he was supposed to be on his back, and [crying sound]... I don't know [crying sound]" .

While Kip awaited his mother's arrival home, the phone rang several times. At 3:30 pm, the Thurston High School English teacher Mr. Rowan called. Kip lied to him regarding his father's whereabouts; he told Mr. Rowan that his father was not there at that time. During another conversation with a friend at approximately 4:00 pm, Kip lied about the location of his father again. Kip told his friend that his father had gone to the store. Within a half-hour, one of Bill Kinkel's students rang in. Kip told him that his father would not be in class that evening due to some family issues.

According to the PBS show *Frontline* (2000), after Bill Kinkel's student called, another call came in very, but this was a three-way conference call from Kip's close friends Tony McCown and Nick Hiaason. Webber (2003) contrasted the PBS stance on the timing of this phone call; she claimed that forensic tests proved that *both* parents were dead by the time this call came in. Regardless, Kip lied once again about where his dad was, saying he "was out at a bar" (PBS, 2000; Webber, 2003).

This conversation lasted longer than all the rest. Kip conveyed his worries about what his parents' friends would think of his actions from that day in school, and the level of embarrassment his parents would feel once people learned of this incident. In a progressive sequence, Kip twisted the conversation toward a surrender of heart stating, "Nothing matters now". His friends spoke of Kip's teetering from emotional upset to pure anger to questioning where his mother was and when she would finally get home, within the same conversation.

At approximately 6:30 pm, Faith Kinkel arrived home; Kip watched for her car through the living room window. She parked in the garage, and Kip met her as she exited the vehicle. In his confession after the shootings, he stated that he helped carry her bags into the house while bearing the gun on his hip. Kip told her he loved her, and from behind, he shot her twice in the head with the .22 pistol. Three shots were fired in her face, and one more shot was launched through her heart (PBS, 2000; Webber, 2003). As with his father, Kip dragged his mother's spent body to another part of the garage and blanketed it with a sheet (PBS, 2000; Webber, 2003).

Conflicting reports indicated Kip's actions throughout that evening. Some reports stated that he simply watched television, although Webber (2003) reported that the cable had been disconnected the month prior so there could not have been reception to watch the show he claimed to have watched. Webber (2003) and PBS (2000) also alleged that Kip cleaned up after his father's shooting in the effort to hide his actions from his mother. When police arrived the following day, Kip's markings were scattered about the house: ammunition was thrown about the floors; bomb making materials were taken out of their



hiding places that were left open for all to see; the CD from the recent *Romeo and Juliet* (1996) movie was placed on repeat mode; and homemade explosives were adorning the linens that encased the bodies of his parents (PBS, 2000; Webber, 2003). A note of confession written by Kip “filled with misspellings and crossed out words” was found on a nearby coffee table, alongside a newspaper that supposedly read by Kip after he killed his parents (PBS, 2000; Webber, 2003).

*May 21, 1998*

Kip completed his outfit that morning with a long trench coat. Underneath, his body donned a black sweatshirt embellished with the large letters of O-R-E-G-O-N that mimicked the arching shape of a rainbow. Ribbing from what appeared to be a white t-shirt peeked out of the neckline of the sweatshirt in contrast (<http://judicial-inc.biz/gal05.jpg>, retrieved September 20, 2008). He chose to fill his backpack with ammunition and three guns instead of the typical text books and pens. He selected the .22 caliber Ruger semiautomatic pistol, the .22 caliber semiautomatic Ruger rifle, and the 9mm Glock pistol from his collection. Taped to his leg was a hunting knife (PBS, 2000; Webber, 2003).

Kip left home with his mother’s Ford Explorer. He made the long drive from their home on the outskirts of Springfield to Thurston High School by 7:55. At that time, the security camera recorded him entering the school cafeteria where he shot and fatally wounded Ben Walker, age 16, who later died at the hospital. Shortly thereafter, Kip shot Ryan Atteberry, who subsequently survived the bullet that lodged next to his spine. Forty-nine more rounds of gunfire blazed through the cafeteria hitting another 24



students; Mikael Nickolauson, age 17, was shot and killed on site. Jake Ryker, after witnessing the shooting of his girlfriend, felt the sting of a bullet piercing his chest. He somehow mustered up enough adrenaline to dive after Kip while he was attempting to place another magazine in his rifle. During this heroic act, Jake fell victim to another bullet, but managed to survive the ordeal .

By 8:04 am, several kids were mounted atop Kip. Kip was heard saying, "I just want to die" . Kip's violent efforts over the two days left four people dead, and 25 more wounded. Officer Dan Bishop was the first to arrive at the scene; he cuffed Kip then transferred custody over to Detectives Jones and Warthen. Detective Warthen recognized Kip from the gun incident the day prior, and he was the detective who was present for Kip's confession at the police station.

Warthen placed Kip in an interview room when they arrived at the police station. He left briefly while Kip was still handcuffed behind his back . During this time, Kip managed to maneuver his arms to the front of his body and grasp the hunting knife that remained unnoticed by the officers who patted him down earlier. Upon Warthen's return, he opened the entry door only to be charged at by Kip aiming the hunting knife directly at him. Quickly, Warthen placed the door between him and Kip; he and another officer returned to the room with pepper spray, and confiscated the knife from Kip .

Approximately twenty minutes later, Warthen allowed Kip to shower once he had been photographed. Kip removed his clothing to reveal one .22 caliber bullet and one .9mm bullet taped to his chest. When asked why he did that, Kip responded with his

desire to ensure there was one of each kind of bullet left over to kill himself (PBS, 2000; Webber, 2003).

### *After the Shooting*

By 9:30 that same morning, investigators discovered the bodies of Bill and Faith Kinkel at the Kinkel house. In addition to this, police searched through Kip's bedroom and found what appeared to be homemade bombs constructed from pop cans and a fire extinguisher . It was reported that the authorities detonated several explosives at the Kinkel house after evacuating surrounding neighbors . In the aftermath, they found several inactive bombs hidden in a crawlspace under the porch.

Dr. Orin Bolstad was a clinical psychologist in the Oregon juvenile prisons who treated juvenile killers in 1998. He examined Kip Kinkel after the shootings at Thurston High School, and testified at Kip's trial . He stated under oath that he queried Kip regarding his voluntary self-report on the Child Behavior Checklist of hearing voices . Kip claimed that he began hearing voices in his head when he was in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade at the age of 12 . Kip articulated the following when he reminisced about the first time he heard voices:

I was on my driveway, looking at some bushes, and a voice said, 'You need to kill everyone, everyone in the world.' It scared the shit out of me. I was confused. It seemed like something was seriously wrong. I ran into the house and cried in my room. It said other things too. It said, 'You are a stupid piece of shit. You aren't worth anything,' and some jumbled words that I can't understand. I was just standing there, looking at the bushes. (PBS, 2000)

Kip described the volume of the voices to Dr. Bolstad, and what they told him:

At first I thought the voices were outside of my head because they were so loud. They were very loud, like SurroundSound... I often hear two voices at the same time, sometimes a third voice. I know they are different. They sound different... One voice always tells me what to do. It's an authoritarian. Loud... The B voice tells me I'm a piece of shit, I'm like that, a put-down kind of voice... They scared the shit out of me. I get pissed. I get angry, hearing these voices. I was very pissed at God, if I believed in him. (PBS, 2000)

When Kip was asked where he thought the voices came from, he responded with,

Well, I had some theories. I was an atheist or an agnostic, I'm not sure. Maybe it was from the devil. I also thought that the government might have put a chip in my head. Government satellites might have transmitted to the chip in my head. (PBS, 2000)

Kip chose not to mention his experiences with the voices to anyone – not even to Dr. Hicks, the psychologist he saw for six months while he was in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. In Dr. Hicks's treatment notes at Kip's intake, Faith Kinkel was noted as describing herself as an emotional person, but that the "family history is negative for psychiatric illness". This was in mild contrast to the neurologist's testimony at Kip's murder trial when he stated that other familial neuropsychiatric diseases were suggestible (PBS, 2000; Webber, 2003).

Dr. Richard Konkol testified to Kip's neurological tests. He spoke of several areas of Kip's brain that appeared to be underactive when viewing them on a SPECT scan, and



on a PET scan. He claimed that Kip had an underactive pre-frontal cortex area, which affected his ability to plan, to carry out plans, to delay reactions to things, or to pay attention . Dr. Konkol also explained that Kip had underactive right and left temporal parietal areas, which impacted his abilities in reading, spelling, writing, and thinking up words . Additionally, Kip's brain displayed deficits in motor and sensory areas. Interestingly, Konkol described the deficit in Kip's frontal area as *huge*, unlike the other area descriptions . In his summary, Dr. Konkol suggested that Kip's neurological findings indicated similarities to findings associated with those who were diagnosed with schizophrenia .

*Dylan Klebold & Eric Harris: Columbine High School, April 20, 1999*

*Briefing on Sources for this Case Study*

One of the discoveries I made in my divergent research on Columbine was of a book written by a close friend of Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris a few years after the Columbine event. Brooks Brown co-wrote the book *No Easy Answers: The Truth Behind Death at Columbine*, a very candid recollection of the events that took place in the years leading up to the shootings. I was able to fill in some of the missing pieces to the complex puzzle with this book, and triangulate the evidence of what appears to have truly happened. The evidence I received from the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department had names blacked out of several documents to protect the privacy of certain individuals. Without this book, I would have been left to guess that Brooks was the person being threatened on Eric's website, and whether or not he played a significant role in that day's horrific event. This would have skewed my research findings dramatically. This book

detailed Dylan's and Eric's friendships, mannerisms, and interests like no other account could have done – this was completed through the eyes of one of their closest friends.

In addition, I was able to obtain an enormous amount of documentation regarding this incident from the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office and the Diversion Office for Juvenile Offenders. These documents and reports detailed the footsteps of Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris for over a year prior to the shootings, and up through the shootings.

### *Background Information*

Located on the eastern rim of the Rocky Mountains lies the town of Littleton, Colorado. This far-reaching southwestern Denver suburb is situated between Bear Creek Lake Park and South Platte Park; the combination of which equate to the hypotenuse of an obtuse triangle which is completed by the ridge of the Rocky Mountains.

Columbine, a large high school located on the edge of Littleton that borders the unincorporated town of Columbine, was home to the "Rebels" athletic teams in 1999. In the shadow of athletics were an active theatrical department, a computer lab used by few, and the traditional high school classroom curricula. Deeper into the shadows was the Trench Coat Mafia, and its associates Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold. Fierce competition seemed to envelope the school's atmosphere in the late 1990s (Brown & Merritt, 2002); it became commonplace – a way of life interpreted by most to be as natural as growing wheat sowed by farmers in the Midwest.

Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris were students identified as gifted and talented who attended Columbine High School. Dylan had been formally identified at an early age, but

Eric had not been formally identified until much later in life. The two boys were common targets for taunting and teasing.

*Dylan Klebold*

Dylan Klebold was a slender boy standing tall and lanky, with wavy auburn hair, and extending face with a rounded nose. He appeared in several photos with a seemingly content expression; his conservative smile had a tendency toward his left side with a slight upward pull toward his left nostril. He had a passion for computers, which was evident on his resume; he reported his experience in being a technical computer assistant at Columbine High School, and his mastery in building computers (Klebold, n.d.; Johnson & Wilgoren, 1999)

The year of the shooting incident, Dylan and his father visited the university where he was accepted for the following school year; his plan was to major in computer programming. They viewed a dorm room, and made plans for his move to college (Brown & Merritt, 2002). All appeared to be in order for Dylan's future; it seemed bright and full of hope.

Beginning in the third grade, Dylan transferred to a public elementary school that hosted a "school-within-a-school" for gifted children entitled CHIPS: Challenging High Intellectual Potential Students. He had been at Normandy Elementary for the years prior. The CHIPS program was located at Governor's Ranch Elementary, a few miles away from the previous school.



### *Eric Harris*

Eric Harris had a petite stance; he was rather undersized in height, weight, and build when compared to peers his age. His face was mouse-like, with high cheek bones, and a narrow and slightly pointed nose. He wore his sandy-brown hair in a seemingly preppy cut for that time: military length in the back with a spike side-part on his right, then tapered toward the ears. In pictures, Eric appeared young-looking and “cute” rather than filled-out, rugged, and handsome which would be typical of late adolescence. Eric was born with a chest abnormality that was noticeable only in the locker room; his chest had an indentation, and this led to mockery by more athletic males than he (Block, 2007; Brown & Merritt, 2002).

Eric, who had moved to and from several military bases with his parents during his younger years, had not attended gifted schools of any sort. It was in Littleton, Colorado, that the Harris family would take residence for a significant amount of time since the state was considered home to his father (Block, 2007; Brown & Merritt, 2002).

Eric seldom spoke of his dreams and aspirations for career goals. Occasionally, he mentioned his plans for entering the military, and his hopes of becoming a computer programmer (Block, 2007; Brown & Merritt, 2002).

### *The Two Meet*

Dylan Klebold was first introduced to Eric Harris in Ken Caryl Middle School, Eric’s seventh school since Kindergarten (Brown & Merritt, 2002; Newman et al, 2004). Once in high school, the two adolescents became closer; they shared many interests and classes together (Block, 2007; Brown & Merritt, 2002). Eric was finally able to

participate in advanced cognitive and creative courses with his friend Dylan; these included courses such as philosophy, psychology, filmmaking, theatre (technical aspects), and creative writing (Brown & Merritt, 2002; Newman et al, 2004). Both loved computers, were avid video game players, and both felt like outcasts among peers (Block, 2007; Brown & Merritt, 2002).

### *Strengths & Interests*

Dylan had great interest in the technical aspects of theatre. He designed several sound scripts for plays presented by the Columbine theatrical department, and was captured in pictures working with Brooks Brown and Eric Harris on various productions (Brown & Merritt, 2002). He also was capable of building computers, as noted on his resume: "Built my personal computer & helped build those of friends & family" (Klebold, 1999). Like Eric Harris, Dylan loved to play video games, and was into computers before they were considered "cool" by the social norm.

In addition to his love of computers and theatre, Dylan was adept in creative writing when he put forth the effort. In his Diversion File, Dylan had described himself as a person who did not have perfect grades in his coursework, but that regular classes did not challenge him enough (First Judicial District Attorney's Office 2, 1998; FJDAO 1, 1998; FJDAO 14, 1998). He was depicted on many websites and in several news releases as being an academic slacker – not putting forth the effort to achieve and maintain the high grades of which he was deemed capable (Brown & Merritt, 2002; Johnson & Wilgoren, 1999). In his creative writing class, he often chose to write about violent topics. He and Brooks Brown (Brown & Merritt, 2002) began a handwritten blog



between them in class; this was in accordance with an in-class assignment that required one person to start a creative story with a sentence or two, then the second person to continue it, and so on. Sarcastic humor was interlaced throughout the writings. This was evidence of Dylan's charismatic character that was depicted throughout some of the violent videos created by Eric and Dylan (Brown & Merritt, 2002; Harris & Klebold, 1999).

Brown and Merritt (2002) wrote of Eric Harris's love for designing complex and violent video games. Eric designed spin-offs to the *Doom* series, *Mortal Kombat*, and *Duke Nukem* video games (Block, 2007; Brown & Merritt, 2002). He purchased the software that allowed him to alter the *Doom* program in various ways, and it was reported that the designs of *Doom III* and *Doom IV* were heavily influenced by Eric's ideas after his death in the Columbine tragedy (Block, 2007). Brown and Merritt (2002) stated, "Eric loved the challenges" (p. 65).

Dylan and Eric created video productions for a film making course in school, and they continued this practice during their free time. Freelance films created by Dylan and Eric involved skits where friends posed as helpless victims in fear of bullies (Harris & Klebold, 1999). Eric and Dylan posed as violent heroes for hire. The perpetrators were assumed to be hunted down and killed by the violent heroes (Harris & Klebold, 1999). In another skit, Eric and Dylan played intellectually mocking roles of criminals caught by police after a car chase. Portrayed by friends as "dirty cops," the police in the film "paid off" the cameraman, who was playing the assumed role of the media, for not telling about their abusive handling of the criminals (Harris & Klebold, 1999). In addition, there were



vignettes of Eric and Dylan taking turns bellowing threatening profanities at the camera as though the person holding the camera was the one receiving the abusive reprimand (Harris & Klebold, 1999).

The video quickly switched to a repeating vignette of a ten-speed bike leaned against an outside wall of a large building presumed to be part of the school. People off camera would sadistically lob a variety of destructive items at the bike. Periodically, Dylan was shown hurling a baseball bat at the bike, destroying it altogether (Harris & Klebold, 1999).

#### *Academics*

It appeared that Dylan Klebold's grades in high school ranged from As to Ds (First Judicial District Attorney's Office 2, 1998; FJDAO 1, 1998; FJDAO 14, 1998). Dylan was reported as saying that he had trouble with some of his classes, but that regular classes did not challenge him enough (FJDAO 1, 1998, p. 2). Dylan's highest grades were in video/filmmaking and government/economics, and his lowest marks were in calculus, gym, and creative writing (FJDAO 14, 1998).

Eric Harris's grades ranged from As to Bs in his last year of high school (FJDAO 1, 1998; FJDAO 19, 1998). His highest marks were in video/filmmaking, government/economics, and German, and his lowest grade was in creative writing (FJDAO 32).

#### *Social-Emotional*

Dylan's last year at Normandy Elementary was spent with a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher who was perceived by Dylan, his mother, and his friend Brooks Brown, to be a child

tormenter (Brown & Merritt, 2002). When he had been playing with his friend Brooks Brown at recess during a seasonal melt-off, they accidentally splashed murky water from a puddle onto a female classmate's new coat. The teacher burst out in anger, and required the boys to scrub the coat with toothbrushes until it was completely clean. Unable to remove all the matter, the boys were yelled at and forced to stay in the restroom and clean until the end of the school day (Brooks & Merritt, 2002).

Entering the accelerated CHIPS program in third grade was a welcome change to Dylan (Brown & Merritt, 2002). He qualified for entrance with high scores on the admissions test, but was exposed to, and often the brunt of, intimidating competition (Brown & Merritt, 2002).

[A]dmission into CHIPS was based on politics as much as ability... As a result, the CHIPS program wasn't a big group of accelerated kids who were there to better themselves. Instead, what you had was one group of kids who had earned their spots, another group of kids who hadn't – and all of them trying to one-up the others, each trying to prove that he or she wasn't one of the "free-ride" kids... Once kids realized that discipline in CHIPS was nonexistent, they went wild... Finding friends within the CHIPS program was virtually impossible... [C]lassmates in CHIPS weren't friends; they were competitors, and it was a battle to make sure that nobody got too far ahead of anybody else. (Brooks & Merritt, 2002, p. 31)

Psychological and physical bullying were evident at Governor's Ranch, and Dylan began to display his temper after being thought of as a child who internalized his emotions –

that he kept his feelings to himself (Brown & Merritt, 2002). Brooks's mother Judy Brown described Dylan as "a sensitive, caring child who worried a lot about what other people thought – perhaps too much for his own good" (Brown & Merritt, 2002, p. 30).

The bullying and teasing continued throughout his stay at Governor's Ranch, and into middle and high schools where he met Eric. Dylan Klebold suffered from the same types of ridicule as Eric, although the scorn inflicted on Eric was reported to be more abundant (Brown & Merritt, 2002). Given his physical characteristics and features, Eric was demeaned by many in school, especially the "jocks" he referred to several times throughout his journals. He suffered daily from peers throwing rocks at his car and empty bottles that shattered at his feet; shoving him into lockers; and throwing food at him during lunch (Brown & Merritt, 2002). Bearing this daily, Eric did not demonstrate his anger or frustration outwardly; rather, he, like Dylan, internalized his emotional reactions around others, and subsequently expressed himself in personal journals which were known to no one but him (Brown & Merritt, 2002).

In addition to the aforementioned types of bullying, Dylan and Eric were also called names such as *faggot*, *drama fags*, *pussies*, and other psychologically charged sexual names throughout adolescence (Brooks & Merritt, 2002; NRCIMNA, 2003; Newman et al 2004). Especially painful for their group of male friends to endure during the later high school years were the taunts aimed at girls who showed interest by talking with them in the hallways. The girls who hung around Eric, Dylan, and the Trench Coat Mafia (TCM), were plagued with the titles *sluts*, *fag lovers*, and *Nazi lesbians* (Brooks &



Merritt, 2002). This indirect bullying of the boys reinforced their exclusion since girls did not want to be deemed such names.

The school climate at Columbine appeared to be competitive and hostile, with peers bullying at every opportunity possible – with and without teachers and administrator’s knowledge. Brooks (Brown & Merritt, 2002) reported that some of the upper classmen would slather baby oil on the floor in the locker room, then would “‘go bowling’ with freshmen; they would throw the kid across the floor, and since he couldn’t stop, he’d crash right into other kids while the jocks pointed and giggled” (p. 50). At other times, students were forced by larger jocks to shove pennies with their noses to the ground; or paper clips were shot at them via rubber band slingshots (Brown & Merritt, 2002). Racial incidents were reported that described some of the jocks playing basketball in physical education class. Whenever they made a basket, they would say racial slurs such as, “That’s another Jew in the oven” (p. 53). The Director of Juvenile Diversion from the Denver District Attorney’s Office stated in her assessment report one year following the shooting incident that deans, principals and their assistants were “often, if not always, coaches, or had a coaching background. This feeds a further perception that athletes were given preferential treatment by those deans or AP’s” (Brown & Merritt, 2002, p. 54).

While the jocks were reported to be popular with the administration, it appeared to many that Dylan and Eric were latent members of the Trench Coat Mafia, a group of male friends that was often described as “marginalized” (Newman et al, 2004; NRCIMNA, 2003). With most members of the TCM having graduated already, it seemed

as though the “gang” had all but dissipated by the time Eric and Dylan were seniors; only a few members remained. Brooks Brown wrote,

Meanwhile, we were the “trouble kids,” because we didn’t seem to fit in with the grand order of things. Kids who played football were doing what you’re supposed to do in high school. Kids like us, who dressed a little differently and were into different things, made teachers nervous. They weren’t interested in reaching out to us. (Brown & Merritt, 2002, p. 50)

Historically, the “jocks” and the “TCM” prided themselves on being rivals (Brooks & Merritt, 2002). They took turns attacking each other in- and outside of school. However, Eric, Dylan, and their small group of friends did not return the fire as readily as did fully active members of the TCM (Brown & Merritt, 2002).

During these late years of high school, Eric’s frustrations and hatred toward the jocks were evident throughout his journals and creative writing assignments: “I am very racist towards white trash p.o.s.’s like \_\_\_\_\_, they deserve the hatred, otherwise I probly [sic] wouldn’t hate them” (Harris, 1998). Eric wrote journals that were so full of hatred, yet he spoke very few words of it to friends during school hours (Brown & Merritt, 2002).

Eric and Dylan worked together at a pizza parlor, along with a member of the TCM who had graduated previously. They passed time at work creating and detonating pipe bombs out of dry ice. There, Eric and Dylan confided in each other about the torment they endured from the jocks, the hatred they felt toward them, and their plans for revenge (Brooks & Merritt, 2002; Block, 2007). Being associated with the TCM and its

legacy, although they were possibly on the margins of it, Eric and Dylan branched into their own leadership roles during their junior and senior years. Eric was described as the soft-spoken organizer of the pair (Brown & Merritt, 2002).

Anger provided the emotional foundation in Eric's personal journal reflections; this later transitioned to plans for violent "missions" against the jocks (Newman et al, 2004; Harris Journals, 1998). Throughout the high school years, Eric's fantasies of revenge began to take focus; he identified himself as "Reb," and Dylan as "VoDkA" (Brooks & Merritt, 2002; Harris Journals, 1998). On April 26, 1998, one year prior to the Columbine shooting, Eric wrote:

Put everyone in [D]oom I and see who can get past atleast [sic] level 1. Actually, then put them in MY worlds. Like Thrasher, Whiskey, UAC Labs, und [sic] TIER. I would love to see all you fuckheads die. NBK [Natural Born Killers]. I love it! Sometime in april me and V will get revenge and will kick natural selection up a few notches. (Harris, 1998, p. 1)

*Doom I* was a violent computer game that revolutionized the gaming industry in the mid-1990s. It was the first of its kind to integrate in-depth 3D graphics where the player was the shooter, and multiple players could partake as well. Soon following the rave response from buyers to this exciting new gaming format, *Doom II* was borne, along with several versions of each (Block, 2007). Eric was said to be an avid fan of this series of games – almost obsessed with them (Block, 2007, Brown & Merritt, 2002). Brooks Brown (Brown & Merritt, 2002) described times when he drove by Eric's house late in the night and saw him playing video games through the window.



The computer offered a fantasy world via video games and the Internet; this was something far different from their experiences in the reality of Columbine High School where rules were enforced for some, but not for others (Brown & Merritt, 2002).

When Eric and Dylan got into the world of video games, they loved it, because it was a world with definite rules. Those rules were preset, and they could not be broken. For a young man in a world like ours, it was a godsend. In the real world, the rules change constantly – and you could be in trouble at a moment's notice. But video games are different.

In a video game you only get what you know; nothing changes. So video games are a sort of haven, an escape to a logical, exciting world where two things are certain: justice is done, and you get what is due you based on your actions. Everything happens through your own doing, your own mistakes, and your own achievements. (Brooks & Merritt, 2002)

In the assessment conducted by the Director of Juvenile Diversion for the Denver District Attorney's Office one year after the shootings, it was found that all students, adults, and faculty members who agreed to be interviewed, acknowledged there was a bullying problem in the school. A recurring category reported by the director was that no one in administration did much of anything about it when the incidents were reported. Additionally, some admitted that when "certain parties" were involved, the incidents were overlooked; some faculty said this was due in part for fear of losing their jobs (Brown & Merritt, 2002).

In another journal, Eric wrote,

It's a tragedy, the human nature of people will lead to their downfall. Peoples human nature will get them killed. Whether by me or Vodka, its happened before, and not just in school shootings like those pussy dumbasses over in Minnesota who squealed. (Harris Journals, 1998)

#### *Items of Significance Prior to Shooting*

*January 1998.* Slightly more than one year prior to the shootings, Eric and Dylan were arrested for stealing electronic equipment from a van that appeared to be abandoned at a nearby park. They bypassed juvenile court proceedings since this was the first incident on either of their records. In addition, their parents were active in their lives, and they were earning reasonably good grades in several honors classes. Eric and Dylan, therefore, qualified for the Juvenile Diversion Program (JDP), a program set up to allow juveniles to avert formal court proceedings and glitches on their records (Brown & Merritt, 2002; FJDAO 12, Newman et al, 2004).

OFFENSE: 1<sup>st</sup> Degree Criminal Trespass (F5), Theft (F4), and Criminal Mischief (M2). On 1/30/98, Dylan Klebold and his codefendant Eric Harris were driving around their neighborhood when they decided to park near the intersection of Deer Creek Canyon Rd, and Wadsworth Blvd to "mess around". They noticed a van parked on the other side of the lot, and went to look inside. They saw alot [sic] of electronic equipment, they broke the van's window, and took the items that were inside. They left the scene, and went and parked at the Jefferson Co. open space nearby. Eric and Dylan were looking at the electronic equipment they took when a Jefferson Co. Sheriff knocked on the window, and began questioning

them about the equipment. Dylan and Eric admitted guilt, they were arrested, booked, and released to their parents. (FJDAO 1, 1998, p. 1)

In the same report, Dylan was described as being “cooperative and open” (FJDAO 1, p. 3). He detailed the two times he used marijuana, and the five or six times he used alcohol to get drunk. He finished with stating that he did not feel alcohol and drugs were worth the effort or money (FJDAO 1, 1998). Dylan’s report continued with verification of his grades and need for challenging academic courses (FJDAO 1, 1998). It was mentioned in the report that Dylan had no attendance problems in school, that he had many friends, and that he got along well with teachers and administrators. The only seemingly negative item reported by Dylan to the officer was that he had received three days suspension in October 1997 for possessing locker combinations (FJDAO 1, 1998). This report contradicted other studies that described Dylan to be “marginalized” (NRCIMNA, 2003; Newman et al, 2004); that he often skipped out on classes with Brooks Brown (Brown & Merritt, 2002); and that he was not liked or appreciated by teachers or administrators (Brown & Merritt, 2002; NRCIMNA, 2003; Newman et al, 2004).

Based on the information in the intake forms of Dylan’s Diversion File, and his willingness to express culpability, he was recommended for the Diversion Program (FJDAO 1, 1998; FJDAO 2, 1998; FJDAO 3, 1998). This granted him a 12-month probation period in which he was required to complete 45 hrs of community service, an evaluation for drugs and alcohol problems/use, an ethics class, bimonthly progress reports, and a written apology to his victim (FJDAO 1, 1998; FJDAO 5).



Eric's Diversion file report contained the same descriptive information as Dylan's; however, his report added that he was on Zoloft, a medication for the anxiety and anger he allowed to build up inside until he exploded (FJDAO 19, 1998). The report also included a phrase in reference to Eric's apparent suicidal thoughts: "but never seriously, mostly out of anger" (FJDAO 19, 1998, p. 2).

The behaviors displayed by the two boys while on the year of probation were described as ideal (Russell, 2008). The boys were present at nearly every scheduled meeting, completed each class required, and wrote reports following the classes to demonstrate their understanding of the material presented in them. They readily offered their opinions and analyses of the classes.

*Eric Rejected by the Military.* There were few episodes when Eric was known to have mentioned his hopes for the future; one was to involve himself in the computer world, the other was to join the military (Brown & Merritt, 2002; Newman et al, 2004; Urso Spina, 2000). Due to Eric's mental health record of anger problems and medication, his application for the military was declined. It was reported that this enraged him (Brown & Merritt, 2002; Newman et al, 2004; Urso Spina, 2000).

*Cyberthreats Toward Brooks Brown.* Approximately one year prior to the Columbine shootings, a disagreement ensued between Brooks Brown and Eric Harris (Brown & Merritt, 2002). As part of the daily routine, Brooks and another unnamed friend would drive Eric a ride to school. Brooks described Eric as an organizer – a person who always wanted to be on time. Brooks admittedly described himself as a person who would get up and go when he was ready, rather than be behold to a timepiece. As time

passed, Eric grew impatient with Brooks in his tardiness, and he began to yell at Brooks criticizing him for being so disorganized (Brown & Merritt, 2002). Brooks claimed he had had enough of being spoken down to like that when he was doing Eric the favor; therefore, he did not hold back his anger any longer. Brooks explicitly told Eric he would no longer give him a ride to school (Brown & Merritt, 2002).

This enraged Eric when he realized the next morning that Brooks was serious. He waited for Brooks to drive up that morning; his anticipation was met only with fury (Brown & Merritt, 2002). After that day, strange things began happening to Brooks, his family, and his friends. Ice chunks were thrown at Brooks's car smashing the windshield; then, threats were made on the Internet (Brown & Merritt, 2002).

Eric Harris had created his own website that was gaining in popularity with the sadomasochistic group (Brown & Merritt, 2002). Eric used this site to make threats against Brooks, then he published Brooks's phone number, and encouraged others to seek him out (Brown & Merritt, 2002). It had been a few months since the two boys had spoken, and Dylan was attempting to walk the line between being friends with each one without exasperating either. In March of 1998 (approximately two months after being arrested for the van incident, and placed into the Diversion Program), Dylan slipped Brooks a piece of paper and voiced directions to check out the website that was penned on it. On the site, Eric stated, "I don't care if I live or die in the shootout, all I want to do is to kill and injure as many of you pricks as I can, especially a few people. Like Brooks Brown" (Brown & Merritt, 2002).

### *Psychological History*

As mentioned, Eric had a history of psychological issues. He had been diagnosed with depression and anger problems, and was subsequently prescribed Zoloft and other medications (Newman et al, 2004). Brooks Brown remembered how Eric's behaviors changed during the year prior to the shootings. He was recollecting his thoughts at that time, trying to make sense of the drastic changes in Eric. The two had not spoken directly for several months, yet when their senior year of school began, they found they had several classes together. Brooks decided to approach Eric, and he apologized for what happened in the past. Eric's response was, "Cool" (Brown & Merritt, 2002, p. 106). It was not until post-mortem when information on Eric's psychological history was dispersed through the media that Brooks was able to make sense of his changes (Brown & Merritt, 2002).

### *Their Plans for the Columbine Attack*

Approximately one year prior to the shootings, Eric and Dylan began planning their attack on Columbine High School (Harris Journals, 1998; Kurtis, 2002; Newman et al, 2004; NRCIMNA, 2003). The plans were evidenced in the journals written by Eric Harris (Harris Journals, 1998) where he outlined their mission: to kill as many students and faculty as possible; then to kill as many medics, police, and fire officers as possible in the aftermath. Early in the school day they were to place propane bombs timed to detonate in the school's cafeteria during the height of the first lunch period. The fleeing survivors would be shot one after the other as they exited the building. Eric freely wrote



that if he and Dylan would survive the attack, they would hijack an airplane and fly to another country where they could not be arrested or found (Harris Journals, 1998).

As simple as the mission was in verse, their plans for instigating the attack were highly detailed, and employed diligent energy for an extended period of time. Eric and Dylan saved up money for an entire year to purchase several types of guns, ammunition, propane for bombs, and piping for pipe bombs – a quantity of each that would certainly have killed the 500 people referred to in Dylan's journal (Klebold Journals, 1998). They videotaped their surroundings in and out of the school, including people, hallways, and rooms. Also added to their video creations were their shooting practices (Harris & Klebold, 1998). They practiced making bombs out of dry ice at the pizza parlor where they both worked. Eric and Dylan practiced "missions" (Brown & Merritt, 2002) in surrounding neighborhoods that included riding their bikes to the homes of selected school enemies in the deep night while solidly dressed in black. During these missions, they shot up the victims' garages, doors, and car windows with paint guns; on some missions they glued the victims' doors closed (Brown & Merritt, 2002). Eric followed up with the enemies in the proceeding days by mordantly mentioning he had heard of the incident. His intellectual superiority over his victim was indicated by pointing out a detail that only the perpetrator could know, yet it was not enough for the police to arrest him (Brown & Merritt, 2002).

Eric had designed the shooting attack in great detail in his journals by drawing animated people carrying multiple combat weapons and ammunition strategically placed on the body for easy access and coverage by the trench coats they planned to wear.

Additionally, there were drawings of the school cafeteria, and markings that indicated the locations of where the propane bombs would be placed (JCSO, 2000).

Eric and Dylan planned to be strategically placed in unassigned parking spaces that flanked the exterior of the cafeteria. Their plan was to fill their vehicles with timed propane bombs set to detonate upon the arrival of law enforcement; Dylan and Eric intended to be gone by then.

*April 20, 1999*

It began as a beautiful sunny day in Littleton, Colorado – unseasonably so (Brown & Merritt, 2002). Brooks Brown finished his cigarette outside of Columbine High School after his second hour theatre class, then proceeded to third hour philosophy class; Eric was missing. In fourth hour creative writing class, both Eric and Dylan were missing. After class, Brooks went outside to have another cigarette when he saw Eric drive up into a parking space that was not his own; it was 11:10 am

Out of concern, Brooks approached Eric to rib him about missing the philosophy exam that day. Eric's unexpected response was, "It doesn't matter anymore," (Brown & Merritt, 2002, p. 4). There was a pause, then Eric looked straight at Brooks and said in an intense voice, "Brooks, I like you now. Get out of here. Go home," (Brown & Merritt, 2002, p. 4). He grabbed two duffel bags out of his car, now oblivious to Brooks' presence, and proceeded on his way. Remembering Eric's controlling tendencies and violent threats against him, Brooks followed the order to go home. He was confused by it, yet heeded the warning (Brown & Merritt, 2002).



At 11:14 am, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold were seen on surveillance video entering the school cafeteria (JCSO, 2000). They placed two duffle bags with 20-pound propane bombs beside two lunch tables, then retreated outside. The bombs were timed to explode at precisely 11:17, a time researched by Eric and found to be when the largest number of students would be in the cafeteria for the first lunch.

At 11:19 the unplanned happened: the bombs did not detonate; therefore, the two had to alter their plans. Meanwhile, three miles away, a diversionary bomb exploded that employed a law enforcement and firefighter response. Eric and Dylan utilized this time to choose a vantage point atop the west exterior staircase to the school. From this point, the two were able to see into the senior and junior parking lots, the athletic field, and the cafeteria entrances and exits (JCSO, 1999). A witness reported hearing, "Go! Go!" from one of the two gunmen while they removed shotguns from their bags and 9mm semi-automatics from under their trench coats (JCSO, 1999).

Shots were fired outside the cafeteria. Rachel Scott, who had been sitting on the grass outside having lunch with Richard Castaldo, was killed while Richard was injured and laying on the grass bleeding. More shots were fired: Dan Rohrbough, Sean Graves, Lance Kirklin, and five more students were hit. Dan, Sean, and Lance continued to flee the area. Dylan descended the exterior staircase after them, shot Rohrbough and Kirklin at close range; Rohrbough was killed instantly while Kirklin was seriously wounded (JCSO, 1999).



Meanwhile, Eric shot Anne Marie Hochhalter multiple times while she attempted to run for protection in the cafeteria. Witnesses were reported as having heard from the gunmen, "This is what we always wanted to do. This is awesome!" (JCSO, 1999).

By 11:24, the perpetrators were inside the school. Most of the students and teachers were trying to make sense of the noises they heard from outside, chalking it up to a senior prank day until Eric and Dylan came into view (JCSO, 1999). Teacher Patti Nielson was in the library at the time she saw through the glass doors two students carrying what she thought to be toy guns. She assumed they were producing a video for their filmmaking class as they had in the past, and they were causing a commotion in the hallway. She proceeded toward the library exit to instruct the two boys to settle down when she was met with bullets shattering the glass doorway spraying fragments of glass and metal into her shoulder, forearm, and knee (JCSO, 1999). Another student named Brian Anderson was trapped between the entrance and exit doors during these same shots, and received chest wounds (JCSO, 1999).

Officer Gardner, the school's security officer, distracted Eric and Dylan momentarily with his vehicle's howling siren and revolving light; Ms. Nielson and Brian Anderson escaped to hide in the library. Eric and Gardner began a shootout, yet neither one succeeded. Eric proceeded inside while students were instructed to evacuate on the east side of the building by teacher Dave Sanders (JCSO, 1999).

It was 11:24 when Eric leaned out the broken window on the double doors into the school, and shot his rifle. Officer Smoker fired three shots at Eric, missing him each time. Witnesses stated that they saw Dylan firing his semi-automatic toward students in

the main hallway and library hallway; they could hear the clinking sound of the bullets hitting lockers that lined each of the hallways while they were fleeing from the danger (JCSO, 1999). Recollecting the tragic day, they remembered hearing Eric and Dylan laughing as they sauntered through the hallways shooting students. Stephanie Munson was hit in the ankle, but was able to escape across the street to a nearby park. The same witnesses said they saw Dylan come to a halt near a collection of phones. One student who was calling his mother to come get him recalled seeing the black sleeve of a trench coat, and hearing shots being fired. He dropped the phone and took cover in the restroom until all became silent, then escaped the building (JCSO, 1999).

At this same time, teacher Dave Sanders ran toward the library where he heard shots being fired. Upon approaching the library entrance, he found a gunman racing toward him. Instantly, he turned to escape; he was inches away from reaching the corner that led to the science wing when he was shot. Still able to crawl into the science hallway, teacher Richard Long pulled Sanders into a science classroom where a group of students sat locked inside. Among this group of students were two Eagle Scouts who administered first aid to Mr. Sanders (JCSO, 1999).

By 11:27, Eric and Dylan were pacing the library hallway randomly shooting, and lighting pipe bombs that were subsequently thrown down into the cafeteria. Teacher Patti Nielson, who was taking cover under the library's main desk, called 911 and instructed the 56 students to take cover under tables (JCSO, 1999).

At 11:29, Eric and Dylan entered the library and yelled, "Get up!" (JCSO, 1999; JCSO, 1999). Eric fired his gun down the main counter; the splinters from the wooden

counter were deflected in several directions and injured a student who was hidden nearby. As the shooters walked through the library they killed one student, and then fired through windows at law enforcement outside (JCSO, 1999). Again, law enforcement returned the fire; neither parties were successful in harming the other. Returning to those in the library, Eric and Dylan shot and killed four more students, and injured another four. They fired at a display cabinet, then killed another three students and injured five. After reloading, they shot and killed two students and injured two more before leaving the library (JCSO, 1999). Their last victim was shot at 11:35 am in the library (JCSO, 1999).

At 11:36, Dylan and Eric left the library to head toward the science area. Witnesses were reported as describing the gunmen looking through the glass windows on each of the classroom doors in that wing. They apparently made eye contact with people locked inside, yet they made no effort to blow the locks out to break in, or to shoot through the windows. The witnesses stated that Eric and Dylan taped an explosive to the door next to the area where Mr. Sanders was being administered first aid. They appeared "directionless" at this point (JCSO, 1999).

Between 11:37 and 12:00 the boys revisited several areas of the school, namely the cafeteria, the office, and the hallway outside the library. They threw another pipe bomb over the railing from the library hallway into the cafeteria below, rested on the staircase between the two areas, and aimed for the undetonated propane bombs still in their strategic locations. Eric shot at the duffel bag bombs without luck, so Dylan approached and fiddled with them. Both boys casually drank from water bottles left on



tables by the phantom diners (JCSO, 1999). Dylan then threw an unviewable item at one of the propane bombs for a partial detonation.

A witness still in the cafeteria, heard one of the shooters say, "Today the world's going to come to an end. Today's the day we die" (JCSO, 1999). By noon, the rampage was nearing its end with the shooters return to the library.

From 12:02 to 12:05, the boys and law enforcement exchanged more gunfire through the library windows. Eric and Dylan shot at paramedics who were attempting to rescue wounded students from the grass area. Once the paramedics left, the gunfire ceased until 12:08 when Eric and Dylan killed themselves with self-inflicted gunshot wounds to their heads (JCSO, 1999).

*Anthony "T.J." Solomon: Heritage High School, May 20, 1999*

#### *Briefing on Sources Used for this Case Study*

Connecting with the Rockdale County District Attorneys Office provided the bulk of the details for the following case study. They were able to provide me with courtroom transcriptions of T.J.'s original trial, the personal writings and psychological evaluations utilized to prosecute and defend his case, and the subsequent appeal transcriptions. Also offered to me was the invitation to continue conversations with the prosecuting attorney in the future.

In addition, I was able to glean many details from the published scholarly studies in *Deadly Lessons: Understanding Lethal School Violence* (NRCIMNA, 2003), and *Rampage: The Social Roots of School Violence* (Newman et al, 2004). These invaluable studies provided the information that filled in the gaps that the courtroom documentation left behind.

### *Background Information*

Following the bend of Interstate 20, also known as the Purple Heart Highway, the suburban city of Conyers, Georgia lay approximately 26 miles southeast of Atlanta. The small town was home to a modest 10,000 residents in 1999 (Advameg, Inc., 2008 <http://www.city-data.com/city/Conyers-Georgia.html> Retrieved 6/29/08). Anthony Solomon, Jr., also known as T.J., was a tenth grade student at Heritage High School who came to reside in the town of Conyers with his mother, stepfather, and sister approximately two years prior to this time.

T.J.'s mother, Mae Dean Daniele, and stepfather, Robert Daniele, were married in 1990, seven years after T.J.'s birth. He was the first child borne to Mae Dean and T.J.'s biological father, Anthony Solomon; his sister, Wendy, was born nearly three years later (NRCIMNA, 2003). T.J.'s stepfather had two children from a previous marriage, one of whom resided with the new family for a few years, then moved on to a college campus nearing the shooting incident (NRCIMNA, 2003).

T.J. was described by his parents as a non-aggressive, rather passive son who never complained. "He didn't want to get involved in issues or arguing. He was kind of reserved, kind of quiet" (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000, p. 352). His stepfather described T.J. as "a very polite child. Yes, ma'am. No, ma'am. Yes, sir. No, sir. Very quiet and... was a little, I felt, immature on issues, but he was a very loving child as well" (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000, p. 352). His stepfather testified to T.J.'s love for outdoor sports, including baseball, golfing, hunting, kayaking, and fishing (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000). His mother furthered this by stating that T.J. had a passion for

baseball, and subsequently, excelled in it when they had lived in Kernersville, North Carolina, for the three years prior to the Conyers move (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000).

T.J. was no stranger to moving. His stepfather testified in court that from the time he had married Mae Dean, the family moved from Denim Springs, Louisiana, to Penbrook Pines, Florida in 1993. Approximately one year later, they moved to Kernersville, North Carolina; three more years passed before they moved on to Conyers (Courtroom Transcription 1, 1999; NRCIMNA, 2003). Once in Georgia, T.J. was enrolled in the latter half of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade at the young adolescent age of 13. After this move, T.J. no longer wanted to play baseball; he took a stronger interest in golfing and hunting (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000; NRCIMNA, 2003). He was more content to sit and listen to music on his headphones for hours while rocking back and forth in a rocking chair in the backyard (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000).

*May 20, 1999*

T.J. Solomon was awakened by his mother Mae Dean Daniele at 7:00 the morning of May 20, 1999. His daily routine consisted of retrieving the newspaper from outside, delivering it to his mother, and receiving his daily dose of Ritalin with a glass of water by 7:05. After this, he proceeded downstairs to shower and dress so he could meet his school bus precisely at 7:45 (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000). It seemed like a typical morning at the Daniele household with the exception of his sister and her friend taking pictures with Mrs. Daniele; the two girls were about to receive several academic awards that day (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000).



T.J. seemed to follow the same routine schedule as he had on all school days prior to this. His mother failed to take note of anything out of the ordinary, yet when T.J. adorned his baggy jeans that morning he made use of the slack by encasing a sawed-off .22 caliber rifle in the pants leg (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000; Rockdale County Investigative Videotape 1, 1999). His outfit was completed with a Nike backpack embellished with the word *Redneck* (Green, 1999).

At approximately 7:55 that morning, T.J. entered Heritage High School's south commons area (Rockdale County Sheriff's Supplemental Report 1, 1999) and pulled out the rifle that had been strapped to his pants leg (NRCIMNA, 2003). He held the rifle at waist height, and sprayed the student body with twelve rounds of fire (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000; NRCIMNA, 2003). T.J. commenced his retreat out the commons doors simultaneously with firing three rounds from a .357 magnum hand gun (NRCIMNA, 2003). The principal followed T.J. out the door with ample distance between them. He found T.J. kneeling on the ground with the rifle encircled by his mouth. The principal told him that everything would be all right. With that, it was reported that T.J. allowed the rifle to fall away from him while he tearfully collapsed into the principal's arms (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000).

The incident was intense yet brief. By 8:00, the Sheriff's Department had already been notified of the shooting; officers were present at the school within minutes (Green, 1999). Investigator Sunny Green arrived at approximately 8:13 to witness several students being cared for by EMT's, and found eight .22 caliber shell casings on the rear commons floor with three additional casings turned in by students (Green, 1999). Six

students were shot during this incident, with no deaths (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000; D'Olivo, 1999; Farber, 2000). This was regarded as an oddity in the case, and reason for subsequent inquiry since T.J. was considered by his parents to be a trained marksman (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000; NRCIMNA, 2003).

Deputy Fry was the initial officer to approach T.J. Fry observed T.J. leaning against the school building with his rifle resting beside him. He ordered T.J. to get down to the ground, then proceeded to cuff him. As this interchange took place, several unspent rounds of .22 caliber ammunition fell from T.J.'s left hand (Fry, 1999). Later at the station, another live round was found in T.J.'s pocket during a pat-down (Fry, 1999).

#### *Following the Shooting*

T.J. was placed in an interrogation room with a video camera recording him (Rockdale County Investigative Videotape 1, 1999). He was noticeably shaken by the events of that morning. He sat in his chair slumped over with his back curved forward to rest his forearms on his lap. He elevated his hands at times to cup his eyes and forehead in the palms; with the heel of his hands, he rubbed his eyes left and right as though he were a child waking from a nap (Rockdale County Investigative Videotape 1, 1999).

Detective Summers entered the room holding his cup of coffee; another agent placed a cup of coffee on the interrogation table for T.J. Summers attempted to calm T.J. by voicing statements such as, "Calm down, T.J. It'll be all right" (Rockdale County Investigative Videotape 1, 1999). Several minutes went by before the detective asked T.J. whether he had eaten breakfast that morning. T.J. responded to the negative by alternating his head from left to right several times while inaudible mumbles



accompanied (Rockdale County Investigative Videotape 1, 1999). The detective began his retreat from the room when T.J. asked if he had hurt anyone. Summers responded, "Well, there's some people not in too good shape. I tell you this, I don't think anybody is critical. I don't think anybody is gonna die" (NRCIMNA, 2003, p. 46; Rockdale County Investigative Videotape 1, 1999). During the several minutes Summers was out of the room, T.J. leaned back in a slump while he quietly yet distraughtly cried the words, "Oh, God! Fuck! Fuck!" (NRCIMNA, 2003; Rockdale County Investigative Videotape 1, 1999). T.J. then kneeled down on the floor and placed his hands in a praying position (NRCIMNA, 2003; Rockdale County Investigative Videotape 1, 1999).

Detective Summers returned then proceeded toward the seat directly in front of T.J. He and T.J. flanked the white table placed against the wall behind them. He mentioned that someone left to get T.J. a biscuit for breakfast. As Summers sipped his coffee periodically, T.J. appeared to take gulps (Rockdale County Investigative Videotape 1, 1999). Approximately five minutes later, the entire cup of coffee seemed to be consumed by T.J. This was evidenced by T.J. lifting the cup and tilting it nearly upside down into his face along with audible slurping sounds as though he were searching for the last drops (Rockdale County Investigative Videotape 1, 1999). Approximately fifteen minutes later, the detective brought in another cup of coffee for T.J. and immediately left the room for an extended period of time. T.J. again took gulps, and finished the coffee within minutes (Rockdale County Investigative Videotape 1, 1999). He repeated the slurping activity for the last few drops while the sniffing and distraught cries of "Oh, God!" continued (Rockdale County Investigative Videotape 1, 1999). When the food was



brought in to him approximately ten minutes later, he took one bite of the biscuit, but guzzled the drink that had been identified as Coke by the investigator (Rockdale County Investigative Videotape 1, 1999).

Hours passed before T.J. was visited by his parents. His stepfather was the first to enter the interrogation room at 9:53; he embraced T.J. upon entering, and asked if he was all right (NRCIMNA, 2003; Rockdale County Investigative Videotape 1, 1999). He seated himself with his back to the video camera, leaned forward, and placed his right hand on T.J.'s left leg soothingly rubbing it back and forth. He subsequently asked a series of questions that were somewhat inaudible; however, T.J. responded to him with "Yes, sir. No, sir" (Rockdale County Investigative Videotape 1, 1999). Mr. Daniele, then asked in a louder voice if T.J. knew why he did it, and T.J. responded, "I don't know why I did it" (Rockdale County Investigative Videotape 1, 1999). This response was repeated several times throughout his time in the interrogation room, and was evident in subsequent conversations with his stepfather and mother (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000; NRCIMNA, 2003; Rockdale County Investigative Videotape 1, 1999).

In stark contrast to the interaction with his stepfather, T.J.'s mother entered the interrogation room at 11:35 that morning, and did not touch him throughout the entire exchange. She did not ask him if he was all right, yet she repeatedly asked why he did not take his own life (NRCIMNA, 2003; Rockdale County Investigative Videotape 1, 1999). His mother asked,

"And you were going to kill yourself, I understand? How did that not happen?"

T.J. replies "I decided not to." She then repeats, in a mocking tone, "You decided

not to, after you shot these five [sic, there were six] innocent people, you decided not to hurt yourself?" (NRCIMNA, 2003, p. 46)

She continuously scolded T.J. throughout the time in the interrogation room.

When she noticed the breakfast biscuit lying on the table, she picked it up and handed it over to the officer who had escorted her in to the room. T.J. did not respond to her inquiries on why he shot at the innocent students. Her response to his lack of explanation at that time was,

"This is the best place for you to be. I mean really. If you don't know why you did it, how they can help somebody that don't [know] why they hurt human beings?" T.J. then raises his voice for the only time in the conversation and says, emphatically, "They can." His mother replies, "No, they can't. Those were children... I don't know how you took innocent children but you were afraid to do anything to you. That really has me puzzled. You didn't think twice about doing it to them." (NRCIMNA, 2003, p. 46; Rockdale County Investigative Videotape 1, 1999)

### *Psychological History*

*Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder and History of Medication.* Early in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, T.J. was diagnosed with having Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). His mother had a conference with his teacher who noticed that "[h]is grades and his conduct were a little abnormal" (Courtroom Transcription 1, 1999, p. 376). The principal and teacher referred her to a physician in Baton Rouge who specialized in ADD; he was then



evaluated, diagnosed, and prescribed Ritalin (Courtroom Transcription 1, 1999). His mother continued with her testimony,

[W]e have the results of the beginning of the fourth grade and then before and after the Ritalin, and it made a dramatic effect on his grades. He went from probably B, C, and D student to all Bs for the next several years...

He wasn't a hyper attention deficit disorder. He was just disruptive to himself. I don't know how familiar you are with that, but he would sit sometimes and tap or whatever and get distracted easily. The teacher would come over and say, now, T.J., the next question is yours, and by the time she got back to the board to put the question on the board, T.J. was distracted with his pencil or whatever. He would draw sometimes. (Courtroom Transcription 1, 1999, p. 377)

The attorney clarified by posing the next question: "So it wasn't an activity that disturbed others but focused inward?" (Courtroom Transcription 1, 1999, p. 377). Mrs. Daniele definitively concurred (Courtroom Transcription 1, 1999).

Interestingly, Mrs. Daniele testified that the doctors recommended she stop administering Ritalin to T.J. at the beginning of each school year so that the teacher could see his behaviors without the medication. After a baseline of behaviors was established with the teachers, Mrs. Daniele was supposed to request a conference with the teachers to inform them of his diagnosis. Immediately following the conferences, she was to reinstate the Ritalin administration to T.J. and compare the behaviors so that the doctor could judge whether or not the medicine should be continued (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000). Mrs. Daniele admitted during her testimony that she did not continue this practice,



and that she no longer sought the advice from physicians on how to administer the medicine. Therefore, there was no professional monitoring from 1997 to 1999, during the adolescent ages of 13 to 15.

The attorney questioned who made the decision of whether to give T.J. medication on a weekly or monthly basis. She responded, "I made those decisions. I tried to keep T.J. off... I was told by some physicians that he should outgrow the need for Ritalin" (Courtroom Transcription 1, 1999, p. 379). Yet, she also stated that she continued to give him Ritalin in varying doses on school days, including the day of the shooting (Courtroom Transcription 1, 1999).

#### *Suicide Lecture & Evaluation*

One year prior to the shooting, the school welcomed a guest speaker to offer a lecture on suicidal behaviors so that students would be more able to identify characteristics in their friends (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000). As a part of the program, the lecturer invited students to anonymously turn in slips of paper with the names of other students who may have exhibited some of these behaviors. Two students wrote down T.J.'s name; hence, a phone call was made to his mother that day (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000). Mrs. Daniele brought T.J. in to Rockdale Mental Health for an evaluation. On the way, T.J. pleaded with his mother stating that he had not done the behaviors he was accused of by the other students (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000).

When the evaluation was complete, the psychologist revealed to Mae Dean that her son appeared to be telling the truth. She said, "He's the sanest person I've talked to" (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000, p. 409). Later that day, Mrs. Daniele spoke with the

two boys who turned in T.J.'s name to the principal. The two admitted that T.J. actually had not said the things they wrote down, and that they were simply joking around when they did it (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000).

### *Academics*

*Academic Environment.* One of Rockdale County's three high schools, Heritage High School hosted approximately 1400 students at the time of the shooting (NRCIMNA, 2003). Described as the leader in the county for SAT scores, graduation rates, and athletics such as soccer and baseball, it was reported that many families moved into that district so their children could attend Heritage (NRCIMNA, 2003). "Heritage was built and designed on a traditional model of educational philosophy that has continued" (NRCIMNA, 2003, p. 38).

Peer groups had labels, some that held typical titles, and others needed further description: "jocks," "preps," "Christian kids," "rednecks," "blacks," "Hispanics," "wiggers," "drama kids," "band kids," "straight-edge mafia," and "loners" (NRCIMNA, 2003, p. 35).

Rednecks were identified as those who like to hunt and fish and listen to country music. Sometimes redneck also means lower class, but other times it does not. Some rednecks come from affluent families and drive new pickup trucks with Confederate flags hanging from the back... Wiggers were white kids who "hang with, act like, or like to date blacks." The straight-edge mafia, also referred to as "vegans," are a group of youth who are vegetarians. They listen to rock and roll

and like to have a good time without smoking, drinking, or using illegal drugs...

(NRCIMNA, 2003, p. 36)

It is difficult to place T.J. into any of these groups as he apparently had not formed strong bonds with anyone since the move to Conyers (Courtroom Transcription, 2000; NRCIMNA, 2003). It seemed apparent, however, that there was great flexibility in these groups, allowing members of each to cross over into others to form friendships (NRCIMNA, 2003).

T.J. was described by his stepfather as "average in school" (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000, p. 350). His stepfather continued with:

The grades started a gradual decline... The last half of the eighth year, and that's when we moved to Georgia. And then in the ninth grade they stayed in that decline state which he normally would make Bs and Cs and an occasional D before we moved to Georgia. From the eighth grade, the last half, Cs and Ds became the norm... [D]uring the ninth grade he made some Fs, and we were trying to envision sitting down with him, talking to him to try to find out what was going on. He failed two subjects. He went to summer school at the end of ninth grade and made As in both subjects... The tenth grade was like a repeat of the last half of ninth grade. They were basically Cs, Ds, and Fs. (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000, p. 358-9)

T.J.'s mother furthered this with her testimony. She was describing his maturity levels when she stated,



T.J. was mature in some respects but very immature... T.J. could not handle a list as well [as the 13-year-old], and I knew that was part of the attention deficit disorder. He was never able to handle a lot of things... [I]f you gave T.J. a list, he wouldn't even attempt it. He wouldn't attempt to retain. He wouldn't attempt to accomplish. One thing at a time he could do extremely well. (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000, p. 391)

Although Mrs. Daniele testified to the dramatically positive effects Ritalin played on T.J.'s grades for several years following his diagnosis, the attorney offered evidence of the contrary to the court. He referred to the marks earned in sixth grade, while the family still resided in Kernersville, North Carolina, when he listed off the following:

C in Communications Skills. D in Math, C in Health and Science. C in Social Studies. D in Spanish. An A in PE. An F in Creative Communication, and a D in for what all the world looks like Car Detailing to me, but I'm not sure... (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000, pp. 401-2)

#### *T.J.'s Strengths & Interests*

Very little was written about T.J.'s strengths and interests other than his passions for sports, especially hunting. Music apparently developed into another passion for T.J. upon moving to Conyers (Rockdale County Investigation Videotape 2, 1999), and it seemed to replace his love of baseball. He would frequently attempt to write song lyrics, and he referred to this activity as a means of expressing himself and his anger (NRCIMNA, 2003). He said that once he was able to put his thoughts into lyrics on

paper, the angry feelings would go away (NRCIMNA, 2003; Rockdale County Videotape 2, 2000).

His interests in music were evolving throughout the time in Georgia; he had been a fan of the country/western and early 70s rock allowed by his parents, yet, he also took new-found interest in rap music (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000), especially by Korn (NRCIMNA, 2003; Rockdale County Investigative Videotape 2, 2000). He was scolded for printing off so many lyrics to songs he admired. His mother did not appreciate the cost of replacing the printer ink, and subsequently threw out the volumes of printed lyrics after singling out the songs with inappropriate words and topics (Courtroom Transcript 1, 2000). These, in turn, were given to his stepfather to read, and he was to decide what the repercussions would be (Courtroom Transcript 1, 2000).

#### *Social & Emotional Aspects*

As part of his supervision, Mrs. Daniele ensured that there was an adult on all of T.J.'s excursions out of the home (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000).

At the time he was arrested, T.J. had been in Georgia for over two years. He had formed no close relationships and had never been on an individual date. He did associate with young people his own age, but only in the context of family, with his cousins, or in organized activities, principally those related to school and scouting. (NRCIMNA, 2003, p. 45)

There were rumors that T.J. was motivated to carry out the shooting by a break-up with a girl, yet these rumors quickly dissipated. It was mentioned several times that T.J. had not

even gone on his first date at the time of the shootings, let alone call anyone his girlfriend (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000; NRCIMNA, 2003).

In December of 1998, just months prior to the shootings, T.J. stole a .22 caliber handgun from his stepfather's boat to sell it to another teenager (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000; NRCIMNA, 2003). Two months later, T.J. and a classmate decided to steal a CD from one of his teachers whom he did not like (NRCIMNA, 2003; Rockdale County Investigative Videotape 2, 2000). Two weeks after this, T.J. allegedly took a gun to school to show it off to a friend (NRCIMNA, 2003), but this was denied by T.J. in subsequent interviews (Rockdale County Investigative Videotape 2, 2000). That same afternoon, T.J. skipped school for the first time (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000; NRCIMNA, 2003). His parents were called by the school administration, and they reported him missing after finding a note on the refrigerator stating that T.J. went fishing with Pat, a friend who was unknown to the parents (Wright 1, 1999; Wright 2, 1999). T.J. returned home around the midnight hour after drinking all day (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000; NRCIMNA 2003). His stepfather sent T.J. to his room, and followed behind him with his belt in hand; T.J. was spanked at the age of 15 (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000; NRCIMNA, 2003). His stepfather testified that this was a routine practice in their household, spanking up to three times per year (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000).

Interestingly, T.J. never welcomed any guests into his home since the move to Conyers (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000; NRCIMNA, 2003; Rockdale County Investigative Videotape 2, 2000). Seldom did he spend time with friends outside of school (NRCIMNA, 2003; Rockdale County Investigative Videotape 2, 2000). Unless he



was accompanied by one of his parents, T.J. was not allowed to spend time with friends socially outside of his home (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000; NRCIMNA, 2003; Rockdale County Investigative Videotape 2, 2000).

The day prior to the shootings, T.J. was caught by his younger sister with cigarettes in his pocket (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000; NRCIMNA, 2003). Wendy told their mother, who then handed them over to her husband upon his arrival from work at 6:00. At approximately 8:30 that evening, the couple sat down with T.J. to discuss the health risks involved with smoking cigarettes (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000). His stepfather was to handle that portion of the discussion. His mother, who worked in a teen pregnancy office, thought it apropos to introduce the topic of all the phone calls T.J. was receiving from girls – phone calls that were refused by T.J. (Courtroom Transcription, 2000; NRCIMNA, 2003). She felt it was the time to discuss the potential risks of sex before marriage, yet he had never even been on his first date (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000; NRCIMNA, 2003). In response to the court's questions regarding T.J.'s participation in this discussion, the parents testified to T.J.'s lack of communication. Therefore, the discussion they were describing was deemed a lecture that endured for nearly two hours (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000; NRCIMNA, 2003). T.J. was sent to bed at 10:00 since this was his bedtime every night (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000).

Under oath, Mr. Daniele spoke of T.J.'s rejections of girls' phone calls; he thought it odd for a teenage boy to show such disinterest in girls. He also testified to other forms of discipline in their household, all of which involved removing/suspending privileges or belongings that held meaning to T.J. For example, his stepfather took away

T.J.'s BB gun on one occasion (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000). They tried to instill in T.J. a desire to get his driver's permit so that it could be used as motivation to strive for something; they figured that this was what most teenagers strove to achieve (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000). T.J. was not interested in learning to drive; the things T.J. was motivated to do involved his passions, namely, writing original song lyrics, listening to music, and hunting and fishing (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000; NRCIMNA, 2003; Rockdale County Investigative Videotape 2, 2000). His mother did not approve of the lyrics he was able to find online, so she had the Internet disconnected from their home (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000; NRCIMNA, 2003).

Mrs. Daniele frequently perused T.J.'s bedroom to ensure orderliness. She stated under oath that she provided an organized household for their family (Courtroom Transcription 1, 2000). She had not found the bomb-making instructions T.J. collected. He stated in his psychological interview that he had had them for years – since before their move to Georgia (Rockdale County Investigative Videotape 2, 2000). “All the orderliness and close supervision of the household, however, appears to have been related to another kind of problem for T.J.: a lack of emotional connection to others, particularly to his mother” (NRCIMNA, 2003, p. 44).

Mrs. Daniele was, however, very attentive to T.J.'s extrinsic needs. “His needs and her responses were in a cycle: the more she tried to manage and control his life, the more he withdrew, and the more frustrated with trying to reach him she became” (NRCIMNA, 2003, pp. 46-47). This was evident in the investigative videotape

immediately following the shooting incident when the following happened in the interrogation room:

At 11:55 am, she says to her husband, "I don't know what else to say, he obviously does not want to talk to us." She turns to T.J. and says, "I don't know what to say to you, T.J., you've made your decision." (NRCIMNA, 2003, p. 47; Rockdale County Investigative Videotape 1, 1999).

Moments earlier, a member of the investigative team peeked his head inside the interrogation room to announce they were about to search the Daniele home. Mrs. Daniele left the interrogation room without touching T.J. She was upset that the detectives were about to search their house without her being there (NRCIMNA, 2003; Rockdale County Investigative Videotape 1, 1999).

#### Summary and Foreshadowing of Analysis

In this chapter, I illustrated in detail the events of the Thurston, Columbine, and Heritage High School rampage shootings. The cases were based on the information available from the district attorneys' offices, and reputable documentary sources. I caution readers, however, that these documents could not possibly detail every facet of these cases. I chose to include them in this study so that I could illustrate the shooters' environments, events surrounding them, and their actions. Additionally, I believed it was important to point out the detail that each shooter demonstrated in their plans for attacking each school, and the emotional proclivities/diagnoses of each shooter before, during, and after their attacks. Some of the shooters demonstrated high levels of planning (complexity of thought; ability to plan in prefrontal cortex), and held out for long periods



of time before implementing their attacks (resistance to closure), while others thought about it in abstract for a long period of time (resistance to closure; ability to plan in prefrontal cortex), took action to purchase weapons, and did not plan in detail in writing. This would be used as evidence toward or against a diagnosis of gifted/talented in the academic, intellectual, or creative realms in subsequent chapters.

In the following chapter, I analyze the writings of these shooters to derive categories and themes. I then discuss the similarities found between this chapter and the analysis of their writings.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS OF EVIDENCE

The necessity of conducting responsible and ethical qualitative research is of the utmost importance. In my opinion, both qualitative and quantitative forms of research are necessary either to gain the most holistic understanding of a situation, or to deliver the meaning of a given situation so that the maximum amount of people will understand its meaning. Several quantitative studies were undertaken in the wake of the rampage shootings in the late 1990s. To complement this, I focused solely on the qualitative inquiry methods of historiographical transcriptions to determine whether there were indications of intellectual or creative forms of giftedness, and whether there were behaviors associated with emotional/behavioral disorders. Given the nature of this study into the perceptions, thinking styles, and intelligences of the rampage shooters, qualitative methodologies were primary. The results indicated that for the perpetrators, the shootings were simply and complexly an abstract expression of perceptive distortions of their communities, school environments, and selves. For some of the shooters, the rampages were completed with artistry in planning, a deadly canvas that stimulated all of the senses.

#### Methodology

When analyzing for meaning of the shooters' thoughts and intents, establishing the presence and type(s) of giftedness, and finding evidence of emotional tendencies, it

was important to obtain the most authentic documents possible. Therefore, I contacted the district attorneys in Eugene, Oregon where the Kip Kinkel shootings took place, and in Conyers, Georgia where the T.J. Solomon shootings occurred, to secure the same documents as the prosecution and defense used in their trials. I first contacted the attorneys by phone to introduce myself and my study. I discussed the study and need for authentic pieces of information concerning the boys. I asked specifically for writings from the boys, but also videotapes and mental health evaluations where possible. The attorneys seemed very willing to make available what they could from their storage in both cases.

The district attorney in Eugene, Oregon where Kip Kinkel's rampage shooting took place was unable to send the documents and videotapes to me, as it would require an enormous effort on his part and the part of the Eugene community to contribute the man-hours. Due to this great limitation, I needed to rely on Kip's writings obtained from a secondary source: the PBS documentary entitled *Frontline* (2000). His writings were filmed on the documentary in what was trusted to be Kip's handwriting. I acknowledge the limitations this places on my present study. It is not preferable to rely on secondary sources for much of the evidence, no matter how authentic the writings may be. Due to this limitation, I transcribed his audiotaped confession immediately following the shooting incident. Again, this holds some limitations as well since I could not see Kip; however, I was able to confirm some of what he and the detective stated on the tape with pictures included in televised and journalistic news reports. For example, the investigator asked Kip why he was found with bullets taped to his chest during the pat-down after his



arrest. I was able to confirm this by observing several pictures of Kip without his shirt on displaying two long lengths of tape in the form of an "X" on his chest. Barely noticeable were the tips of the bullets peaking out from behind the tape. This added to the credibility of the source, so I therefore included these writings in this analysis.

Because Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold were found dead at Columbine High School after their rampage, I ascertained the authentic writings from the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office where the investigation of the shooting took place. There was an abundance of creative and journaled writings, artistic pictures, and violent and creative video tapes from which to choose; therefore, I had to limit the documents to a number that was congruent with the number of documents available from the other shooters. The hand-drawn pictures were also eliminated from the analysis in order to stay in balance with the evidence from the other perpetrators.

For T.J. Solomon's rampage at Heritage High School, there were very few lyrical and journaled writings, and four videotapes; they included his interview with the detectives, and subsequent conversations between T.J. and his parents immediately following the shooting; and interviews with a psychologist hired by the court to determine T.J.'s state of mind. There were few journal writings, and one audio recorded confession of T.J. taken immediately after his shooting spree. In addition, the district attorney who tried the case also sent me the handwritten request by T.J. for his sentence reduction. I eliminated his handwritten request because it was not congruent with the other artifacts; it was written years after his shootings while he was in therapy and on therapeutic medications, so I did not feel it was indicative of his emotions and thought

processes at the time of his shooting. I also excluded it since I was unable to confirm or disaffirm whether it was coached by another person. The writings I included in this analysis were those which he chose to do of his own free will in the time around his crime. I believed these were more indicative of his thinking processes and his emotions at the time being studied.

In Corrine Glesne's (2006) text, she wrote,

To figure out what techniques to use, once again contemplate carefully what you want to learn. Different questions have different implications for data collection. In considering options, choose techniques that are likely to (1) elicit data needed to gain understanding of the phenomenon in question, (2) contribute different perspectives on the issue, (3) make effective use of the time available for data-collection. (p. 36)

Without straying from this quotation from Glesne (2006), I would add a note of practicality in the interest of explicating the choice for qualitative methods. This study was not to count how many shootings occurred during the past several years, nor to add up the arsenal of weapons used in each shooting. In this situation, mathematical equations served no purpose in making sense of how the shooters felt about their environment or selves, nor about the processes involved in their intellectual or thinking preferences. Practically speaking, qualitative inquiry was the only method to choose since the impact of these facets could not be realized through numbers.

In this chapter, I offer an analysis of the writings of each shooter on the basis of: (1) categories derived from the meaning of their words; and (2) tendencies for utilizing

particular intelligences and/or creativity to express their thoughts. Following this, I compared and contrasted the shooters to establish patterns in their thoughts, perceptions, and actions, in addition to the categories derived from the initial analytic portion.

*Understanding Qualitative Research: From Discovery to Validity and Reliability*

Studying the actions of the rampage shooters from the perspective of an educational researcher allowed for interesting and surprising discoveries (McMillian & Schumacher, 1997). I became enthralled with the journals and writings of these boys, enveloping myself into their world. This was necessary to gain their perspective of the situations in which they found themselves, and to draw a holistic picture of the settings and their abilities (McMillian & Schumacher, 1997; Seidman, 2006). Creating the vision of *their* reality necessitated my immersion through data collection (Stainback & Stainback, 1998). “[T]he goal of the process is to understand how our participants understand and make meaning of their experience” (Seidman, 2006, p. 24). McMillian and Schumacher (1997) furthered this when they said that the purpose of historiographical research is to understand the actions and thoughts of people or policies *at that particular time* in history, given the environment and culture. They stated that its purpose was to create a holistic picture by looking at multiple facets that may influence the others, rather than at one. In this sense, individual facets could be unified into more of a whole.

Immersion cannot and should not be instilled without proper acknowledgment and protection of my own values. Stainback and Stainback (1998) as paraphrased in the writing of Auer (2000), stated that qualitative research is bound to our own values as



researchers. To ensure nonbiased evaluations of the presence of giftedness, creativity, and emotional/behavioral problems, while allowing for the subjectivity of my perceptions of their circumstances, I had to acknowledge my own values of what giftedness is: that it may come in many forms, and these forms could be construed by others as controversial. In my value system, I place spirituality, family, and education above all else. I believe that existential intelligence exists as Gardner (1998) suggested; I also believe that it flows much deeper within a person than any other intellectual realm – perhaps to the very core of a person.

Acknowledging these strong yet continuously developing values, it stands to reason that question of reliability may surface with my being the instrument utilized in the analysis of these situations. By recognizing this bias, I was able to take measures that aided in the integrity of the data. Powdermaker (1966) refers to this self-reflection by saying, “Although a cliché, the saying is true that insight into one’s self inevitably deepens understanding of others” (p. 39). Thus, the conditions set forth for this study were such that the natural settings in which the shooters were found were left untouched and uncontrolled (McMillian & Schumacher, 1997). Historiography, by its very nature, seeks to analyze the facts of the past to make meaning of the relationships involved, and to establish truth in its exploration of social and human problems (Brickman, 1982; Creswell, 1998; McMillian & Schumacher, 1997). Creswell (1998) stated, “The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study” (p. 15).

In seeking the truth, there were several limitations I had to evade or circumvent. In the Columbine case, the two shooters reportedly killed themselves; therefore, I could not interview them, nor could there be member checking of my interpretations of their journals and creative writing samples. I was unable to interview Kip Kinkel or T.J. Solomon to establish accuracy of my accounts of their cases. However, this country employs the judicial system, however imperfect, to ensure the most honesty and accuracy possible. Hence, I enlisted the aide of the district attorneys and sheriffs' offices to provide me with the actual courtroom testimonials of the psychologists and family members, the authentic writings of the boys, and audio- and videotapes immediately following the rampages of the two boys who remained alive.

The importance of my acknowledging the limitations this created is of value. Typically, the evidence collected by the prosecution would be weighted against the accused. In other words, the evidence presented by the prosecution at the trials of these adolescents would be submitted in the effort to build a case against them; therefore, they chose the most graphic and violent writings, and those that would be indicative of how the prosecution felt their thinking processes were at the time of the shooting. Understanding this, I still requested these writings because: (1) I was not looking for blame or accusation with this, rather, I was looking for indications of intellectual, academic, and/or creative giftedness through their use of words; and (2) I wanted to see from primary sources their thinking processes in multiple styles of writing. Importantly, however, I knew that district attorneys and investigations need to keep evidence and courtroom testimonials in storage, and that educational facilities are bound by laws not to

disclose work from students to anyone, in addition to the difficulty in finding family members of these boys who would be willing to talk with me about them within the time allowances for this study. It should be noted that I attempted to contact the superintendents in the districts where these boys attended school to request the student files that may have included pieces of their work, and their behavioral records, with no luck. In addition, I tried to locate parents of some of the boys, and the sibling of another. Again, I had no luck with this without being more intrusive in their lives; therefore, I chose to respect their privacy, and continue on with this study as a historiography rather than an ethnography.

## Analysis

### *Coding and Derivation of Categories*

The journaled and creative writings of the shooters were first transcribed into a word processing format to allow space for penciled coding in the margins. The voice recordings from the audiotapes and videotapes were transcribed as well. Codes were derived for meaning of words, creativity and complexity in thought (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996), and multiple intelligence strengths (Gardner, 1993, 1998, 1999). Codes were then listed on a separate document for each shooter; categories emerged from similar codes. There were many times when I needed to restart the spiraling qualitative process to ensure the preservation of meaning and truth (McMillian & Schumacher, 1997).

A table of categories for each of the shooters precedes the following analytical breakdown. It indicates in graphic form, the amount of supporting codes for each category for each shooter.



Table 1. Categories Derived from Writings of Shooters

	Kip Kinkel	Eric Harris	Dylan Klebold	T.J. Solomon
Existential Thinking	<sup>^</sup> 24	<sup>^</sup> 34	<sup>^</sup> 29	<sup>^</sup> 10
Control/Power	5	<sup>^</sup> 46	<sup>^</sup> 31	<sup>^</sup> 16
Image	<sup>^</sup> 8	<sup>^</sup> 27	<sup>^</sup> 4	<sup>^</sup> 4
Blame	<sup>^</sup> 8	4	3	3
Cognitive/Affective Thinking Problems	4		1	1
Lacking Meaningful Connection	<sup>^</sup> 12	4	3	4
Meaningful Connections				2
Creativity	5	9	<sup>^</sup> 15	<sup>^</sup> 4
Intellectualization		<sup>^</sup> 34	<sup>^</sup> 4	2

<sup>^</sup> Indicates the major categories derived from the number of supporting codes.

#### *Categories Derived from Kip Kinkel's Writings*

I analyzed the confession of Kip that was found after his arrest, his written statement to the victims' families at his sentencing hearing, and several excerpts from his journal writings. There were a number of codes that evolved into the following seven categories in descending order of the number of codes supporting them: (1) Existential Thinking, (2) Lacking Meaningful Connections, (3) Image, (4) Blame, (5) Control/Power, (6) Creativity, (7) Cognitive/Affective Thinking Problems. The categories *Image* and *Blame* were evidenced by an equal number of codes.

*Existential Thinking.* Existential precocity should be described as the tendency to think or question about existence in a spiritual realm. It also includes the proclivity to seek hope, love, and peace, and to question why and how people attain value in the world. There were several areas in which Kip wrote of his existential precocity. He was

15 years of age at the time of his arrest, yet journal entries evidenced an existential style of thinking prior to that day. "I don't know who I am. I want to be something I can never be. I try so hard every day. But in the end, I hate myself for what I've become" (Kinkel, as cited on PBS, 2000).

Kip continued in his journal with expressing his quandary over whether he was capable of love.

It feels like my heart is breaking. But is that possible. [sic] I am so consumed with hate all of the time. Could I ever love anyone? I have feelings, but do I have a heart that's not black and full of animosity? (Kinkel, as cited on PBS, 2000)

While in the state of drunkenness, Kip continued his existential quandaries:

Why did God just want me to be in complete misery? Why aren't I normal? Will I see it to the end? What kind of dad would I make? All humans are evil. I just want to end the world of evil... I don't want to see, hear, speak or feel evil, but I can't help it. I am evil. And there is no such thing. We kill him – we killed him a long time ago. Anyone that believes in God is a fucking sheep... If there was a God, he wouldn't let me feel the way I do... Love isn't real, only hate remains. Only hate.

(Kinkel, as cited on PBS, 2000)

Each time Kip mentioned the name of God, spoke of his capability to love someone, or wondered what kind of father he would be, he was thinking of the "infinite and the infinitesimal" (Gardner, 1999, p. 60). These are all indications of existential thinking, and of existential precocity since teenagers of this age typically do not think this deeply or intensely about God and love, or worry about such things as fatherhood.



*Lacking Meaningful Connections.* The second category of *lacking meaningful connections* was evidenced by Kip's lack of friends or relationships with others. In a lengthy journal found in Kip's bedroom after the shooting incident, he wrote of his loneliness. "I sit here all alone. I am always alone... Every single person I know means nothing to me. I hate every person on this earth. I wish they could all go away. You all make me sick" (Kinkel, as cited on PBS, 2000). He continued with stating, "Even though I am repulsive and few people know who I am, I still feel that things might, maybe just a little bit, get better" (Kinkel, as cited on PBS, 2000).

Further on in his journal, he stated, "I feel like everyone is against me, but no one ever makes fun of me, mainly because they think I am a psycho" (Kinkel, as cited on PBS, 2000). Several times throughout the journal, he seemed to cry out for help, especially from a particular girl whom he perceived as rejecting him. "I need help. There is one person that could help, but she won't... Please. Someone, help me. All I want is something small. Nothing big. I just want to be happy" (Kinkel, as cited on PBS, 2000).

*Image.* As stated in the aforementioned category *lacking meaningful connections*, Kip claimed that he felt as though everyone were against him although no one made fun of him. Yet, he thought that others perceived him to be "a psycho" (Kinkel, as cited on PBS, 2000). This was indicative of his egocentric thinking; he often noted phrases that reflected his perception of his image, and how he perceived others to view him. These types of phrases indicated that he worried about what people would say about him, and whether they would laugh at him.



In addition, Kip penned in his journal, "I sound so pitiful. People would laugh at this if they read it. I hate being laughed at. But they won't laugh after they're scraping parts of their parents, sisters, brothers, and friends from the wall of my hate" (Kinkel, as cited on PBS, 2000). When Kip self-evaluated from the perspective of his peers, he contemplated what his image was in their eyes.

*Blame.* Blame was the fourth category in the analysis of Kip's writings. Blame referred to phrases in which Kip would attempt to deflect or accept responsibility of his actions. In the confession note written by Kip that was found on the coffee table in the Kinkel home after his arrest, Kip penned, "I have just killed my parents! I love my mom and dad so much... It's not their fault or the fault of any person, organization, or television show" (Kinkel, as cited on PBS, 2000).

Kip made a statement to some of his victims who were present for his sentencing hearing. In this statement, he accepted the blame for his actions.

I have spent days trying to figure out what I want to say. I have crumpled up dozens of pieces of paper and disregarded even more ideas. I have thought about what I could say that might make people feel just a little bit better. But I have come to the realization that it really doesn't matter what I say. Because there is nothing I can do to take away any of the pain and destruction I have caused. I absolutely love my parents and had no reason to kill them. I had no reason to dislike, kill or try to kill anyone at Thurston. I am truly sorry that this has happened... I take full responsibility for my actions (Kinkel, as cited on PBS, 2000)

When Kip stated that he took full responsibility for his actions after outlining his thinking process for attempting to come up with wording that would make the victims' families feel better, he accepted the blame.

*Control/Power.* Kip voiced in his journal his desire to take control and rid the world of evil. He prolonged his discussion of control at various intervals within the same journal entry, yet the comments were still unfocused on any one way of being in control.

I know everyone thinks this way sometimes, but I am so full of rage that I feel I could snap at any moment. I think about it everyday. Blowing the school up or just taking the easy way out, and walk into a pep assembly with guns. In either case, people that are breathing will stop breathing. That is how I will repay all you mother fuckers for all you put me through...

There is one kid above all others that I want to kill. I want nothing more than to put a hole in his head. The one reason I don't: Hope. That tomorrow will be better. As soon as my hope is gone, people die.

I ask myself why I hate more than anyone else. I don't know. But my head and heart want him dead. He only knows who I am through reputation, and I know he is scared of me. He should be. One bad day, and there will be a sawed off shotgun in his face or five pounds of Semtex under his bed. (Kinkel, as cited on PBS, 2000)

When Kip mentioned his daily thoughts of blowing up the school, taking the ability to breathe from people, and threatens to use a sawed off shotgun on boy he referred to, he was illustrating his desire for taking control in a violent manner. In contrast, when Kip

mentioned his desire to take the easy way out, and when he stated that when he ran out of hope people would die, he indicated his desire to give up control.

*Creativity.* There were a few statements in Kip's journals that supported a category of creativity. The amount of creative statements indicated a low level of creativity in Kip's writing. Kip described how his eyes felt when he claimed he was drunk while writing in his journal. "My eyes hurt. They hurt so bad. They feel like they are trying to crawl out of my head" (Kinkel, as cited on PBS, 2000). He also stated, "Every time I see your face, my heart is shot with an arrow" (Kinkel, as cited on PBS, 2000). Making use of metaphorical language is a form of creative expression that instills a visualization in the mind of the reader.

Other indications of creativity centered around the paradoxical traits of rebelliousness combined with conservatism, responsibility combined with irresponsibility, and reality combined with fantasy (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Kip spoke through the senses, "I don't want to see, hear, speak or feel evil, but I can't help it. I am evil. I want to kill and give pain without cost" (Kinkel, as cited on PBS, 2000). The term *kill* was a realistic yet rebellious concept, yet Kip ended this sentence with "give pain without cost," which was indicative of fantastical thinking and irresponsibility.

*Cognitive/Affective Thinking Problems.* Kip literally acknowledged that his mind was not working properly when he claimed, "I am strong, but my head just doesn't work right" (Kinkel, as cited on PBS, 2000). Again, in his confession note left at the scene of his initial shootings on the coffee table, he wrote, "My head just doesn't work right. God damn these VOICES inside my head" (Kinkel, as cited on PBS, 2000). His admission of



his head not working correctly was a concrete example of his perspective of it not working properly.

Moreover, there was evidence of his mind not working logically, although he strived for it in his journal.

It is easier to hate than love. Because there is much more hate and misery in the world than there is love and peace. Some people say that you should love everyone. But that is impossible. Look at our history it is full of death, depression, rape, wars and diseases. I also do not believe in love at first sight. But I do believe in hate at first sight. Therefore love is a much harder feeling to experience.

(Kinkel, as cited on PBS, 2000)

When Kip spoke of the ease of hatred versus the difficulty in loving, he attempted to logically reason it through, yet his reasons his ease of hatred were that there was more of it in the world, and that there was record of it in various forms in the past. In the following sentence, Kip seemingly jumps to another concept of love at first sight, then his belief in hate at first sight, and finally, his summary sentence that apparently was supposed to equate his reasoning for hating being easier than loving. In mathematical terminology, A plus B did not equal C.

In his statement to the victims who were present at his sentencing hearing, he closed with, "These events have pulled me down into a state of deterioration and self-loathing that I didn't know existed. I am very sorry for everything I have done, and for what I have become" (Kinkel, as cited on PBS, 2000). He, therefore, admitted and acknowledged that his mind was not thinking as it should.

### *Categories Derived from Eric Harris's Writings*

I limited my analysis of the abundant writings of Eric Harris to one school research paper, two academic responses, one creative writing paper from school, one creative writing piece found in his journals, one self-reflection paper from an anger management class he participated in while on the Diversion Program for stealing the equipment from the van, and several journal entries. The categories derived from these writings are the following written in descending order of codes supporting them: (1) Control/Power, (2) Existential Thinking, (3) Intellectualization, (4) Image, (5) Creativity, (6) Blame, and (7) Lacking Meaningful Connections. The categories *Existential Thinking* and *Intellectualization* were supported by an equal number of codes.

*Control/Power.* The category of *control/power* was derived from Eric's journals and creative stories through multiple levels of analysis. Eric specifically asserted his desire to be God, his intense feelings of wanting to have everyone "officially" beneath him, and vengeful tone in the detailed plans to exact revenge on others.

Eric wrote of alien invasions in his creative writing story that evidenced the category *control/power*:

I must go on to fight whatever waited ahead, I am the only one left on humanities [sic] side of the battle... I almost laid down beside my fallen comrades and just went to sleep, as some of them appeared to be. But that would mean that they [sic] bad guys would win, and I just could not allow that to happen. (Harris, 1998)

When he wrote that the main character could not allow the bad guys to win, he was illustrating the main character's inability to allow control to go into the hands of someone or something other than he.

In Harris's personal journal writings, his passions for power and control were freely penned: "HATE! I'm full of hate and I Love it. I HATE PEOPLE, and they better fucking fear me if they know whats [sic] good for em [sic]" (Harris, 1998). These were threats he made in attempt to make people fear him; this is a common control technique used to gain power over situations.

In addition, Eric extended his desire for power into the sexual realm when he wrote,

Who can I trick into my room first? I can sweep someone off their feet, tell them what they want to hear, be all nice and sweet, and then "fuck em [sic] like an animal, feel them from the inside" as Bezner said. (Harris, 1998)

This was indicative of sexual control.

Imagining what may come to pass after their shooting rampage, Eric demanded the following:

... I don't know who will be left after we kill but damnit don't change any policies just because of us. It would be stupid and if there is any way in this fucked up universe we can come back as ghosts or what the fuck ever we will haunt the life out of anyone who blames anyone besides me and V. (Harris, 1998)



Eric was demanding control over future policies even when he planned on being dead at that time. In fact, he threatened once again, to come back as a ghost or in another form, to haunt others if they altered policies in response to his shooting acts.

Deepening this category, there were several references to natural selection in Eric's journals; it was a natural process that served as one of the underpinnings to evolutionary theory. In natural selection, survival of the fittest reigned. It was the lack of ability to think in animals that left behind their only mode of survival: fight or flight response. Eric wrote:

Isn't America supposed to be the land of the free? how [sic] come, If i'm [sic] free, I can't deprive a stupid fucking dumbshit from his possessions If he leaves them sitting in the front seat of his fucking van out in plain sight and in the middle of fucking nowhere on a Frifuckingday night. NATURAL SELECTION. (Harris, 1998)

Natural selection is a term derived from evolutionary science where only the most powerful survive in the animal world. Eric seemed to state his affirmation of the concept when he wrote the term in capital letters. In addition, he claimed that he should be able to steal someone's possessions if he felt like it, which is indicative of taking control or power over another person's items.

*Existential Thinking.* Believing in an afterlife of some sort is indicative of existential thinking. In the same quote used above to point out the category of *control/power*, it also served as evidence of existential thinking for Eric:

... I don't know who will be left after we kill but damnit don't change any policies just because of us. It would be stupid and if there is any way in this fucked up universe we can come back as ghosts or what the fuck ever we will haunt the life out of anyone who blames anyone besides me and V. (Harris, 1998)

When Eric referred to being ghosts or another entity after his death, he was referring to an afterlife. This was indicative of the existential thought that contemplated the infinite (Gardner, 1999).

Eric continued with this form of thinking in a lengthy journal where he wrote passionately about the plans he shared with Dylan Klebold for the Columbine massacre: "It would be great if god removed all vaccines and warning lables [sic] from everything in the world and let natural selection take its course" (1998). Again, this demonstrated his belief that there was a G/god, which was indicative of existential thinking.

Deepening this category, Eric literally stated his understanding of existentialism: "Call it exostenstiolism [sic], or whatever the fuck u [sic] want. We know what we are to this world and what everyone else is" (Harris, 1998). On April 12, 1998, Eric's existential thinking began a powerful and distorted turn,

...no one is worthy of shit unless I say they are, I feel like God and I wish I was, having everyone being OFFICIALLY lower than me. I already know that I am higher than almost anyone in the fucking welt [German for 'world'] in terms of universal Intelligence [sic]. And [sic] where we stand in the universe compared to the rest of the UNIV. and if you think I I [sic] know what I'm talking about then

you can just “BUCK DIGH” and saugen mein Hund [unpublishable German profanities]! (Harris, 1998)

This was especially bothersome in that Eric finally stated in the literal sense that he felt like God, he wished he were God and that all people were beneath him on a hierarchy. This was another sign of his thinking existentially.

By July 1998, Eric wrote, “...there is no such thing as True Good or True evil, its [sic] all relative to the observer. Its [sic] just all nature, chemistry, and math. Deal [sic] with it” (Harris, 1998). In capitalizing the words *true* and *good*, his writing was synonymous with existential authors such as the writer of the children’s *Old Turtle* series (Wood, 2003), and religious orders such as Catholic, Lutheran, and Presbyterian. In addition, the words “True Good” and “True evil” indicated his search for truth, which emanates the definition of existential thinking.

*Intellectualization.* There was much evidence in Eric’s writings that he felt intellectually superior to others. This category should be described as the process by which the shooters legitimized their actions, and/or how the shooters portrayed themselves intellectually. One of the aforementioned quotes that was utilized as support for the existential thinking category also served as the precursor to the sentence that evidenced his intellectualization:

It would be great if god removed all vaccines and warning lables [sic] from everything in the world and let natural selection take its course. All the fat ugly retarded crippled dumbass stupid fuckheads in the world would die, and oh



fucking well if a few of the good guys die to [sic]. Maybe then the human race can actually be proud of itself. (Harris, 1998)

In a journal, he wrote about how society was “dumbing down,” and how he seemed to know what others did not:

Society many not realize what is happening but I have; you go to school, to get used to studying and learning how your [sic] ‘supposed to’ so that drains or filters out a little bit of human nature. But that’s after your parents taught you what’s right and wrong even though you may think differently, you still must follow the rules. (Harris, 1998)

In delineating their plans for the shootings, Eric differentiated his and Dylan’s intellectual superiority when he wrote, “...I don’t want no fucking laws on buying fucking PVC pipes. we [sic] are kind of a select case here so I [sic] think this will happen again” (Harris, 1998). To further this category, Eric also wrote literal phrases of his intellectual abilities as superior to others’ abilities:

We learn more than what caused the civil war and how to simplify quadratics in school. We have been watching you. People we know what you think and how you act. All talk and no action. People who are said to be brave or courageous are usually just STUPID then they say later that they did it on purpose cause [sic] they are brave when they did it on fucking accident... (Harris, 1998)

Further indications of Eric’s perception of intellectual superiority were found in his journals: “I already know that I am higher than almost anyone in the fucking welt [German for ‘world’] in terms of universal Intelligence [sic]” (Harris, 1998). Moreover,

Eric compared his ability to think more than others, and more deeply than others. This was indicative of intellectualization through metacognition.

*Image.* In addition to Eric's desire for control/power, his intellectual perceptions of himself and others, and his existential thinking, he indicated his desire for improving his image. This category was often interlaced indirectly. In his creative story on the alien invasion of the military base on the moon, he wrote, "The bright room ahead suggested that I wouldn't have anywhere to hide once I showed myself" (Harris, 1998). This indicated that he may have feared showing his true self; this was also evidenced in his response paper to the anger management class in which he was required to partake after stealing the equipment from the van. In his response paper, he evaluated the course stating that he felt the instructors were qualified to teach the course, but that he felt it was for those who did not already know what anger was. He stated that he learned the hierarchy of anger stages, and the various strategies for controlling anger, yet he neglected to evaluate or synthesize how he would apply these strategies to his own life. Thus, he placed himself "above" needing this course since it did not apply to him.

Additionally, Eric's journals created a strong current toward the derivation of this category:

I always try to be different, but I always end up copying someone else. I try to be a mixture of different things and styles but when I step out of myself I end up looking like others or others THINK I am copying. (Harris, 1998)

In his strides toward existential understanding, Eric penned:

I have figured it out, the human race strives for excellence [sic] in life and community, always wanting to bring more “good” into the 147rinn. And nullify “bad” things. Anyone who thinks differently than the majority or the leaders is deamed [sic] “unusual” or weird or crazy. (Harris, 1998)

*Creativity.* Eric wrote with high levels of description in all of his writings; his creative writing sample indicated a medium-high level of creativity, yet a high degree of passion as well. He authored the following:

As I walked through the broken door entrance to the final military installation, I realized that this hellish experience was almost over. The invasion was stopped, all of the aliens were dead, and whatever wasn't dead was waiting for me ahead. While I was leaning against a granite wall in the large calmly lit room, I scanned over the dozens of marine bodies that scattered the floor in front of me. A last, futile, stand that wasn't enough to ward off the alien attacks. Bullet shells sprinkled the floor, on top of the carpet of blood...

As I entered the last military base on the moon, I came upon a hellish sight. Bodies of my former marine buddies were scattered across the stone floor. The deathly dark glow of light from above was barely enough to notice the blood and flesh splattered on the large slabs of granite that passed for walls. (Harris, 1998)

In Eric's journals, he dreamed of killing people; he envisioned this happening through the senses and recorded these dreams. These were a combination of reality mixed with fantasy, and animalistic in nature.



I want to tear a throat out with my own teeth like a pop can. I want to gut someone with my hand, to tear a head off and rip out the heart and lungs from the neck, to stab someone in the gut, shove it up to the heart, and yank the fucking blade out of their rib cage! I want to grab some weak little freshman and just tear them apart like a fucking wolf. Show them who is god. Strangle them, squish their head, it their temples into the skull, rip off their jaw, rip off their collar [sic] bones, break their arms in half and twist them around, the lovely sounds of bones cracking and flesh ripping, ahh... so much to do and so little chances. (Harris, 1998)

*Blame.* In his journals, Eric spoke dichotomously: he wanted the blame/credit for his planned actions in the shootings, yet blamed others for his hatred toward them.

...do not blame anyone else besides me and V for this. I [sic] blame my family, they had no clue and there is nothing they could have done, they brought me up just fucking fine, I [sic] blame toy stores or any other stores for selling us ammo, bomb materials or anything like that because its [sic] not their fault... (Harris, 1998)

Eric seemed to want the blame for his actions; this was almost of the tone of wanting credit for them. He continued in other journals regarding this category of *blame* in that he felt others deserved the racism they experienced:

Niggs and Spics bring it on them selves [sic], and another thing, I am very racist towards white trash p.o.s.'s like \_\_\_\_\_, they deserve the hatred, otherwise I probly [sic] wouldn't hate them. It's a tragedy, the human nature of people will

lead to their downfall. Peoples [sic] human nature will get them killed. (Harris, 1998)

Although he seemed to want credit for his actions, he also described in this excerpt that people were deserving of what they were about to get. This was a sort of blame on people for being human.

*Lacking Meaningful Connections.* Although Eric wrote literally of his desire to seek deeper meaning from things such as song lyrics, there were also evidentiary pieces that pointed out his lack of meaningful connections to others at school and society.

Ever wonder why we go to school? Besides getting a so called education its [sic] not to [sic] obvious to most of you stupid fucks but for those who think a little more and deeper you should realize it. Its [sic] societies [sic] way of turning all the young people into good little robots and factory workers, I [sic] why we sit in desks in rows and go by bell schedules, to get prepared for the real world cause [sic] "I [sic] what its [sic] like." (Harris, 1998)

At multiple times, Eric doubted others' ability to think deeply; this was supportive of the notion that he lacked deep and meaningful connections with others. Moreover, in his anger management response, he neglected to make the interpersonal connection between violence and its repercussions on people as paramount over material expense. He wrote one sentence to explain the consequences of violence and anger, yet it appeared that more emphasis was placed on the monetary consequences by utilizing more descriptors of these. "Violence is expensive, along with anger. Committing violent crimes brings forth fees, bills, and punishment that have very deep consequences on that person, not to

mention the emotional turmoil it causes” (Harris, 1998). He elaborated no further on the emotional impact on human beings.

*Categories Derived from Dylan Klebold’s Writings:*

The analyzed writings of Dylan Klebold consisted of one school research paper, one creative writing paper, one creative writing sample from his journals, and several journal writings. The following categories were derived from his writings in descending order of the number of codes supporting them: (1) Control/Power, (2) Existential Thinking, (3) Creativity, (4) Image, (5) Intellectualization, (6) Blame, (7) Lacking Meaningful Connections, and (8) Cognitive/Affective Thinking Problems. The categories *Image* and *Intellectualization*, and the categories *Blame* and *Lacking Meaningful Connections* were equally supported.

*Control/Power.* Several indicators pointed toward the category *control/power* in Dylan’s writing. Similar to the description of this category in the analyses conducted on the writings of Kip Kinkel and Eric Harris, Dylan wrote with a desire to obtain power. He chose to write a research paper entitled “The Mind and Motives of Charles Manson” in which he focused on describing Manson’s power over his cult members.

Charles Manson would later have a “family” of these followers, who literally did whatever he asked. They found happiness in his and eachother’s [sic] presence. It was mainly a piece of the hippie movement, a way to stray from the norm and live opposite of what one was raised to learn. The structure was simple: he was the leader, the Christ, and martyr of the group, and they listened to and did what he said. This type of control, however innocent the motives, could be



considered a cult, and was later labeled as such. Yet, the main principals behind their family was, and only was, Manson's will. (Klebold, 1998)

As I analyzed the creative and personal writings of Dylan, power and control seemed to be spoken of as though there were a fork in the road. In his creative writings for school, the main character became more powerful throughout the graphic and violent scenes. Yet, in his personal journals, he described himself as weak and flawed, and ultimately gave up his power to others' judgments of him. Moreover, Dylan began to offer power to the guns and knife that dressed the violent and powerful man in his creative writing story.

It was faint at first, but grew in intensity and power as I heard the man laugh. This laugh would have made Satan cringe in Hell. For almost half a minute this laugh, spawned from the most powerful place conceivable [sic], filled the air, and thru the entire town, the entire world... The next four preps were not executed so systematically, but with more rage from the man's hand cannon than a controlled duty for a soldier... Then, instead of reloading & finishing the task, he set down the guns, and pulled out the knife. The blade loomed huge, even in his large grip. (Klebold, 1998)

*Existential Thinking.* As with the categories in the analyses of the other shooters, *existential thinking* was derived from the thinking processes demonstrated through Dylan's writings. Thinking deeply about questions and philosophies concerning love, peace, and happiness, were indicative of existential precocity.

In the beginning of his senior year, Dylan wrote a paper entitled "Senior Predictions," in which he outlined his desires for the future. He wrote,

Another foreshadowed aspect of my senior year would be deciding about colleges. My predicted major is in the computer field, which helps me since the demand for knowledgeable computer technicians, network administrators, & programmers is high...

The crucial need for decision making within the next year is definitely [sic] foreseen [sic]. I, (probably) will be deciding what the rest of my life looks like. In these decisions are where I would want to live. About this I have no idea yet... These & other important decisions await my response within my senior year.

In conclusion, senior year poses many new factors. Those being the change in my social life, the college preparation [sic], & the need for decision making that might tell me what my future will look like. Although these are things that are predictable, there will still be questions. (Klebold, 1998)

In Dylan's research paper on Charles Manson, he referred several times to Manson's likeness to Christ, and Dylan's search for "truth." He declared,

The structure was simple: he was the leader, the christ [uncapitalized], the martyr of the group, and they listened to and did what he said...

Manson has been proclaimed by many to be insane. The question of whether or not he is insane is a question of opinion, which cannot have a "true" right answer...

Charles Manson, on many occasions, has compared himself to Jesus Christ. He believed that he was Christ, and the world had made him suffer. just [sic] as Christ did two thousand years ago. He also had his family believing that he was Christ. (Klebold, 1998)

Several other references to Christ, including the crucifixion, were within this paper; these references indicated Dylan's existential precocity in his decision to focus the majority of this paper on this topic. Dylan opened his discussion on Manson by creating an analogy between Manson's life and the film *Natural Born Killers* by Oliver Stone. "Although still on Earth, they live by their own morals, beliefs..." (Klebold, 1998).

In his journals, Dylan described his perceptions of society, and what the afterlife would be like:

The framework of society stands above and below me. The hardest thing to destroy, yet the weakest thing that exists...

Society is tightening it's [sic] grip on me. Soon I & Reb [Eric] will snap. We will have our revenge on society & then be free to exist in a timeless place of pure happiness. I didn't want to be a jock, I wanted the happiness that they have - & I will have something infinitely better. (Klebold, 1998)

Continuing this category, Dylan wrote of his desires for peace, love, and happiness. "I just can't take it... all these thoughts... make my heart twist... I [sic] must have happiness... love... peace. Goodbye" (Klebold, 1999). Again, as Gardner (1999) suggested in his description of existential intelligence, the pondering of love, happiness, peace, and infinity or life after death, were all indicators of this thinking style.



Additionally, in his creative story of a dark, violent, and powerful man confronting a group of “preps,” Dylan again drew attention to the spiritual realm when he wrote,

Yet, in the midst of the nightlife in the center of the average-sized town, this man walked, fueled by some untold purpose, what Christians would call evil... He smoked a thin cigar, almost a sweet clovesque scent, emanated [sic] from his aura... It was faint at first, but grew in intensity and power as I heard the man laugh. This laugh would have made Satan cringe in Hell. For almost half a minute this laugh, spawned from the most powerful place conceivable [sic], filled the air, and thru the entire town, the entire world. (Klebold, 1998)

Dylan ended the story with the following evidence of his existential thinking:

The man picked up the bag and his clips, and proceeded to walk back the way he came. I was still, as he came my way again. He stopped, and gave me a look I will never forget. If I could face an emotion of god [uncapitalized], it would have looked like the man. I not only saw in his face, but also felt emanating [sic] from him power, complacence, closure, and godliness. The man smiled, and in that instant, thru no endeavor of my own, I understood his actions. (Klebold, 1998)

The quote, “If I could face an emotion of god, it would have looked like the man... but also felt emanating [sic] from him power, complacence, closure, and godliness,” indicated that Dylan was imagining what it might be like to face a form of god in order to describe the power of his main character in the story. It also indicated that his main character, who may be god-like in Dylan’s imagination, was powerful, and emanated peace and

acceptance of the end. All of these indicated a level of existential precocity rather than simple surface-level thinking.

*Creativity.* Creativity indicated high levels of resistance to closure (lengthy and descriptive wording), originality, fluency, and flexibility in writing. In his essay entitled "Senior Predictions" Dylan demonstrated tendencies associated with creativity. These included responsibility combined with irresponsibility. "I predict that myself, as well as everyone other senior, will have more fun this school year than any others in the past. I will have more freedom, with the same basic guidelines, meaning more time for less responsibilities" (Klebold, 1998).

In his creative writings, however, there were indications of high levels of creativity. He described scenes in great detail that created a visual image of the scene in the reader's mind.

The room smelled of gunpowder among other combustible chemicals. Sacs of bucshot [sic], messily piled up along the desk, & spilling out onto the floor, there to trip the unwearry [sic] visitor. The black powder scented air [unreadable] the room, & made a fire black dust settling over the Federal shotgun shells & the shell-making machine. On the bed, the unused, unmade, old tired bed were his tools, the AB-10, the uzi lying there in hibernation. Back on the desk, as I swept 9mm bullets and magazines onto the floor, I found, among the chemical stains & burn marks, an ancient photo album open to pages of people at the beach. These people were in the midst of a vacation I presumed, a time of happiness. (Klebold, n.d. 1)

Dylan engaged all the senses in his creative writings, even the more violent stories.

What was most recognized about the man was the sound of his footsteps. Behind the conversations & noises of the town, not a sound was to be heard from him, except the dark, monotonous footsteps, combined with the jingling of his belt chains striking not only the two visible guns, in their holsters, but the large bowie knife, slung in anticipation of use. The wide-brimmed hat cast a pitch-black shadow of his already dimly lit face. He wore black gloves, with a type of metal spiked-band across the knuckles. A black overcoat covered most of his body, small lines of metal & half-inch spikes layering upper portions of the shoulders, arms, and back...

Three shots were fired. Three shots hit the largest prep in the head. The shining of the streetlights caused a visible reflection off of the droplets of blood as they flew away from the skull... The shots from the gun were felt just as much as they were heard. (Klebold, 1998)

*Image.* Afraid of how Dylan would be perceived by others during his life and after his death, Dylan continued his deep thinking throughout his journals, supporting the *image* category:

I know that I am different, yet I am afraid to tell the society. The possible abandonment, persecution is not something I was to face, yet it is so primitive to me... [I] don't KNOW what I do wrong with people (mainly women). It's like they are set out to hate me. I never know what to say or do. (Klebold, 1999)



He assessed himself through others' perspectives of hatred toward him; this gave others the power to judge him, and subsequently created a negative social and emotional image of himself. He came to believe in the portrait he thought others painted of him.

*Intellectualization.* The category *intellectualization* was indicative of Dylan's ability to utilize deeper thinking and extensive vocabulary. It also was derived from his tendencies to logically think through things or describe characters he adorned with intellectual "power" in his stories. Dylan wrote with rich description in his creative stories. Contributing to this rich yet gruesome script were intellectualizations such as, "He stopped about 30 feet from the door, and waited. 'For whom?' I wondered, as I saw them [the preps] step out. He must have known their habits well, as they appeared less than a minute after he stopped walking" (Klebold, 1998). This would indicate that the dark and powerful man had studied the habits of the preps.

Dylan added to his story,

The man then pulled out of the duffel bag what looked to be some type of electronic device. I saw him tweak the dials, and press a button. I heard a faint, yet powerful explosion, I would have to guess about 6 miles away. Then another one occurred closer. After recalling the night many times, I finally understood that these were diversions, to attract the cops. (Klebold, 1998)

At that time, it was not known that the idea of diverting the attention of cops (and other task forces) would be employed in the plan for the Columbine massacre. This would indicate that Dylan thought through a complex scene and planned for his main character being smart enough to divert the attention of authorities away from him so that he could

get away with his violent acts. This was a form of intellectual manipulation on the part of the character which could not have been attained without Dylan going through the same intellectual reasoning since he was the creator of the character and story.

*Blame.* Dylan spoke of blame only three times in the writings I analyzed. He wrote of blaming society for shaping Manson into the person he became.

Manson had felt that society dumped him, and he felt great rage for society, and people, and later found an anthem for his rage. When asked about his actions, many years after the murders, he had said that he is a part of everyone, that he mirrors people, because they shaped him. (Klebold, 1998)

Second, Dylan depicted the preps as weak characters who deflected blame in fear of the dark and violent man.

“What’re you doin’ man... why are you here...?” The man in black said nothing, but even at my distance, I could feel his anger growing. “You still wanted a fight huh? I meant not with weapons I just meant a fist fight... cmon [sic] put the guns away, Fuckin [sic] pussy!” said the largest prep, his voice quavering as he spoke these words of attempted courage. Other preps could be heard muttering in the background; “Nice trench coat dude, that’s pretty cool there...” “Dude we were jus [sic] messin [sic] around the other day chill out man...” “I didn’t do anything, it was all them!!” (Klebold, n.d. 2)

In his journals, he wrote, “Goodbye. Sory [sic] to everyone,” which would indicate his acceptance of blame for the outcome of his future actions. Parallels could be drawn from the creative writing story where the preps mocked the dark and powerful man for wearing

the trench coat to how Dylan was mocked as well. However, the only personal indication of accepting blame was in his journal when he apologized and said goodbye.

*Lacking Meaningful Connections.* Indicators of Dylan lacking meaningful connections were shown through parallels. In his short story about the abandoned room with emptied ammunition and the ancient photo album, Dylan wrote of abandonment and the faces of people being crossed out.

...the uzi lying there in hibernation. Back on the desk, as I swept 9mm bullets and magazines onto the floor, I found, among the chemical stains & burn marks, an ancient photo album open to pages of people at the beach. These people were in the midst of a vacation I presumed, a time of happiness. Yet, on these pictures, a withered black X thru some people's faces. The scent of ammonia & gunpowder overwhelmed me, as I went to a window to let some air and light into the dark, abandoned room. (Klebold, 1998)

These phrases led me to believe that he, as the author, either wondered why the faces were crossed out, and the room was abandoned through violent means, which would indicate he lacked the connections necessary to reason it through; or that he, as the author, knew why they were as described in his story, but may not have made the connections meaningful enough to place them into words for the reader.

*Cognitive/Affective Thinking Problems.* Although only spoken of once in his journals, Dylan referred to his thinking as being the cause of his emotional problems. This piece was significant as its effects could be linked to his perceptions of everything surrounding and within himself. Therefore, I chose to include this as a category all to



itself. "I just can't take it... all these thoughts... make my heart twist... I [sic] must have happiness... love... peace. Goodbye" (Klebold, 1999). He spoke of "all these thoughts" in the sense that the reader would be led to believe there were too many thoughts to handle. This indicated to me that he had difficulty handling his emotional thoughts, and admitted to this in simple phrases here.

#### *Categories Derived from T.J. Solomon's Writings*

The majority of writings by T.J. that were analyzed consisted of creative, poetic, and lyrical excerpts. Additionally, I analyzed one journal entry. Gleaned from this analysis were the following categories in descending order of the number of codes supporting them: (1) Control/Power, (2) Existential Thinking, (3) Image, (4) Creativity, (5) Blame, (6) Lacking Meaningful Connections, (7) Meaningful Connections, (8) Intellectualization, and (9) Cognitive/Affective Thinking Problems. The categories *Image* and *Creativity* were equally supported in codes; and the categories *Lacking Meaningful Connections*, *Meaningful Connections*, and *Intellectualization* were evidence by an equal number of codes.

*Control/Power.* Several of the writings from T.J. that I analyzed included poetic scripts. Several of them indicated his desire for taking control *through the use of* violence, yet also demonstrated his willingness to give up control *to* violence. The following excerpts that indicate his desire and inability to take control were taken from his lyrical writings; therefore, they were written in poetic format to maintain the appropriate rhythm and verse.

"The road yet winds

Into the ground.

I follow the path

Which leads me down” (Solomon, 1999)

This verse demonstrated his clear choice in following the path downward in the poem; the remainder of the poem illustrated for the reader that this was his choice to die since this was written from the perspective of the writer (i.e., first person). To further this category and extend it into T.J.’s desire for control by giving it up, the following lyrics were appropriated from his poetry:

It’s the final solution

Like Adolf said,

It’s the final solution,

Imma [sic] shoot until they [sic] dead.

No hesitation,

I ain’t holdin’ back shit.

Reload the 12-pump,

And turn they [sic] insides to grits. (Solomon, n.d.)

Found in another poem, this category continued:

Don’t even start to run, motherfucker

Don’t try,

cuz [sic] I can you on the flee

and that ass is gonna die;

motherfucker, die, motherfucker, die.

I wish death to all these bitche's [sic].

Punk ass motherfuckers.

I get the last word, or

Better yet, it be my glock.

Screamin' loud as fuck,

And then the conversation stop.

Ain't no need to yell,

I know it hurts so bad,

But it only takes a second,

To place that ass up in a bag.

My body is a cage,

Filled with homicidal rage.

I'm fresh out of solutions, so

I turn to the gauge. (Solomon, n.d.)

*Existential Thinking.* Once again, T.J. wrote of existential quandaries such as his pathway toward hell, his questioning of the existence of God, and his asking for forgiveness prior to his shooting spree. T.J. wrote a poem entitled "Hell's Distant." The last stanza included the first indicator of his existential precocity:

Forgive me, father,

My hour's up.

For, I have sinned,

And don't give a fuck. (Solomon, 1999)



In this stanza, the words mimic those stated when entering a Catholic confessional, yet the 'f' on 'father' was left uncapitalized which was in contrast to the proper noun usage.

T.J. referred to a higher power in subsequent writings, including his other poetry and journals.

I'm down to my last victim, grinnin',  
As they, stumble to their knees, praying  
"God, please, don't let this crooked  
Motherf\_cker [sic] murder me!" But then I  
Blast 'em [sic], for no mother f\_ckin' [sic] reason.  
It's like open day on human-hunting season. (Solomon, n.d.)

T.J. asked for forgiveness, and referred to the afterlife in another poem:

Living pictures of my enemies, family times  
God, forgive me, cuz [sic] it's wrong, but I plan to die.  
Either take me into heaven, and understand it wasn't me.  
I did the best I could, raised in insanity.  
Or send me to hell, cuz [sic] I ain't begging for my life.  
Ain't nothing worst [sic] than this cursed, and hopeless life. (Solomon, n.d.)

*Image.* *Image* was the next category derived from T.J.'s writings. For T.J., image was represented in his attempts to explain that his true self was not the same person as his actions portrayed him to be. This erupted in his desire to be understood for *who he was* as opposed to *what his actions made others believe him to be*. T.J. referred to his perception of self when he asked God to:

“Either take me into heaven, and understand it wasn’t me.

I did the best I could, raised in insanity.” (Solomon, n.d.)

In another poem, T.J. referred to himself as a “baller.” This contributed to his perception of self.

“Understand, for when I die,

I was a baller, and probably high” (Solomon, 1999).

There were several indications of T.J.’s desire to be taken seriously in his brash prose.

“I even warned ‘em [sic] once,

Don’t think it did any good.

But now this shit’s for real,

And Imma [sic] make it understood” (Solomon, n.d.).

*Creativity.* T.J. authored several poems, which in itself, was indicative of high levels of creativity within musical intelligence. He wrote brash wordings, but with creative meter analogous to current rap music. Regarding his choice of words, his high level of creativity became apparent with the following descriptions in verse:

“Mercy is for the weak, when I speak, I scream.

Afraid to sleep, I’m having crazy dreams.

Living pictures of my enemies, family times

God, forgive me, cuz [sic] it’s wrong,

But I plan to die” (Solomon, n.d.)

In the first line, he empowered his voice through creative wording; he brought to life his dreams in lines two and three. Dreaming vividly also is considered to be a creative characteristic. For the reader of these words, it created a rhythm that could be imagined and heard inside the mind; this indicated a talent for writing musically, but not necessarily intellectually.

*Blame.* Indications of T.J. feeling he was mistreated by people were evidenced by poetic verses that expressed his frustration toward others. He blamed others for the position in which he found himself. He also abstractly expressed blame on others for his wishes to be dead since he felt that existing in the world surrounded by those he disliked most was worse than dying. T.J. spoke abstractly about blaming others for how he felt about himself and his choices. In one poem, he penned,

“I’m fed up, hold up,

That’s it, fuck that shit.

I’m sick of bein’ thrown

Into this bottomless pit” (Solomon, n.d.)

When he stated that he was “sick of bein’ thrown into this bottomless pit,” he was blaming someone else for throwing him there; he did not state that he chose to go into the bottomless pit. Again, this poem, like his others, were written from the first person perspective; therefore, when I state “he,” I am equating that term with the main character of the poem.

Additionally, T.J. insinuated that God would take the main character to hell, rather than he choosing hell for himself through his actions, when he wrote,



“God forgive me, cuz [sic] it’s wrong, but I plan to die.

Either take me into heaven, and understand it wasn’t me.

I did the best I could, raised in insanity.

Or send me to hell, cuz [sic] I ain’t begging for my life.

Ain’t nothing worst [sic] than this cursed, and hopeless life. (Solomon, n.d.)

In a journal entry that was not written in verse, T.J. explained the personal connection he made with the Columbine shootings. He mimicked the letter written by Eric Harris when Eric wrote that he didn’t want people to blame his parents, school administrators, or the stores for selling them PVC piping:

One big Question everybody’s probably wondering about now is WHY?! Well, for the sake of my brother’s [sic] and sisters related to the Trenchcoat [sic] Mafia, that will have to remain a mystery to the public eye. I have been planning this for years, but finally got pissed off enough to really do it. This mission has nothing to do with Hitler, not because I was picked on, it goes further than that. (Solomon, n.d.)

T.J. was very obscure in this writing over where the blame should be placed. He stated that Hitler was not to blame, nor was the teasing he apparently endured; he said it went “further than that,” which left the blame open to interpretation.

*Lacking Meaningful Connections.* T.J. demonstrated several times that he lacked meaningful connections with others. He purposely took measures to avoid having friends over to his house, and he rejected phone calls from girls at his home. He also displayed a lack of meaningful connections when he poetically declared his uncaring attitude toward

his sins. As stated before, T.J. claimed several times that he enjoyed writing and downloading lyrics to songs he felt helped him express himself. There were four instances where T.J. discussed in verse his lack of remorse for his actions. In his poem "Hell's Distant", T.J. wrote,

"Forgive me, father,  
My hour's up.  
For I have sinned,  
And don't give a fuck" (Solomon, 1999).

In another lyrical writing, T.J. again referred to his lack of caring:

"What you gonna [sic] do, when the fire roll by.  
Kill another motherfucker, and I don't ever cry" (Solomon, n.d.)

Additionally, T.J. demonstrated a lack of meaningful connections with others when he wrote,

"Laughin' at my victims try to get away quick,  
As I eject another shell and make their fuckin' life quit" (Solomon, n.d.).

The laughter he spoke of would indicate his uncaring attitude toward his victims. Finally, T.J. poetically stated,

"But then I blast 'em [sic], for no mother f\_ckin' reason.  
It's like open day, on human-hunting season" (Solomon, n.d.)

The fact that he wrote of there being no reason for hunting people down was indicative of a lack of meaningful connections. As note of clarification, T.J. left out the *u* from the

aforementioned profanities throughout one of his poems. I quoted his writing in every aspect possible; therefore, I left out the *u* to maintain authenticity.

*Meaningful Connections.* T.J. warned others in his writing of what he was about to do; this was indicative of the meaningful connections he made with others. As a note of clarification, other rampage shooters also forewarned others of their upcoming rampages; however, T.J. did so in writing that illustrated a different tone. This was a more caring tone, rather than a mocking one as in Eric's journals. It demonstrated that he cared about them enough to warn them.

I'm still not sure if bombing the school is such a good idea, so I'll at least give you an idea of what's going on... Be very, careful. The drop of a safety-pin could set at least six off. (I've tried that). (Solomon, n.d.)

*Intellectualization.* T.J. demonstrated his ability to think things through intelligibly when he wrote of his plans in his journal. Word choices indicated that he was able to plan things out methodically.

I'm still not sure if bombing the school is such a good idea, so I'll at least give you an idea of what's going on. If the cops have been doing their jobs correctly, you would have found that sheets I've printed out with the bomb procedures on it. Four of these bombs, including three that are not on there have been placed somewhere in, or around Heritage High School. All, in all there are maybe only 17, if that. Be very, careful. The drop of a safety-pin could set at least six off. (I've tried that). (Solomon, n.d.)



In two different verses, T.J. lyrically problem-solved, however, he chose to solve his problems through violence in both prose and actions. The first verse affirmed this category:

“It’s the final solution  
Like Adolf said,  
It’s the final solution,  
Imma [sic] shoot until they dead.  
No hesitation,  
I ain’t holdin’ back shit.  
Reload the 12-pump,  
And turn they [sic] insides to grits” (Solomon, n.d.).

Additionally, the second verse acknowledged this category as well:

“My body is a cage,  
Filled with homicidal rage,  
I’m fresh out of solutions,  
So I turn to the gauge” (Solomon, n.d.).

Out of solutions, the main character from whose perspective the poem was written claimed he was out of solutions, which indicated he had thought things through intellectually to find solutions to solve his dilemma.

*Cognitive/Affective Thinking Problems.* There was only one indicator of this category; however, cognitive/affective thinking problems have the ability to distort perceptions of self, others, and situations that could have enormous impact on actions.

Hence I included it in this analysis, and it was supported by part of a verse written by T.J. "My body is a cage, filled with homicidal rage" (Solomon, n.d.). This did not indicate clear or logical thinking, rather creative or abstract, perhaps.

#### Summary of Themes, Assertions, and Discussion

With the evidence supporting the categories and connections, I made the following themes about the four adolescent males studied in this analysis:

*Theme 1.* The desires of the boys to improve their image may have been their motivation to take control of the negative circumstances in which they perceived themselves to be.

*Theme 2.* The perpetrators felt devalued for their natural proclivities for creative and/or intellectual strengths, which may have caused them to question existentially why they were here, and to blame a higher power for their burdens.

*Assertion.* The aforementioned themes may have contributed to self-doubt of their value in the world; hence, contributions toward a diminished level of social-emotional self-efficacy may have deepened, which in turn, may have stimulated their need for gaining power and control to improve their image according to their perceptions and the perceptions of their peers.

#### *Discussion*

As Bandura (1994, 1986) and Pajares (2002) asserted, the three contributing factors to developing self-efficacy that function together and influence each other continuously are: (1) personal factors such as biological, intellectual, and emotional proclivities; (2) environmental factors such as academic organization, familial structures,

and social templates that include expectations of behaviors; and (3) actual behaviors. The interplay between the three areas aided in formulating a level of self-efficacy within an individual.

Kip Kinkel's personal factors were that he was a gifted adolescent with learning disabilities, who also demonstrated severe depressive and schizophrenic behaviors as diagnosed by psychologists. In his environment, his parents were highly respected teachers who placed cultural experiences among the highest values in order of importance. His first year of schooling was in Spain when he was at preschool age; he was placed in a foreign speaking classroom, which frustrated him significantly. When he returned from Spain, he entered the first grade at the typical age appropriate for Kindergarten in the American school system. His sister was a very successful student who won awards and gained scholarships for college. Kip struggled in some areas of school because of his disabilities that were undiagnosed until fourth grade, yet he thrived in math and science. His mathematical and scientific achievements placed him into the TAG program for gifted learners, but he was made fun of socially because of his disabilities, and because of his size. Regarding his behaviors, he was reported as being a class clown of some sort, who also boasted of his weekend animal "kills." In the killing of his parents, Kip acted somewhat spontaneously, yet he stated in his journal that he planned to kill at the school because of how he perceived others to view him, and because of the continuous voices inside his head demanding that he kill.

Eric Harris's personal factors included his intellectual and creative giftedness in writing and designing computer games. His emotional tendencies were such that he was



very extroverted in his writing, elucidating his passions, and he was very introverted in public settings such as school. He was formally diagnosed by a psychologist with having anger issues and depression. His environment consisted of two parents living at home with a father in the military. His parents were reported as being less involved with his daily activities than other parents. The family moved several times during his younger years. In the academic environment, athleticism and unhealthy competition thrived through the usage of bullying. This bullying was often ignored by teachers and administration, and appeared as such because of bias toward athletes. Eric's behaviors in public settings were nearly ideal; he demonstrated proper etiquette toward people, a good work ethic, and strong academic grades. However, in the school setting, he began showing outwardly his desire for being accepted for who he was – original; he displayed this need through his dress with the black trench coat, fatigue pants, and combat boots. He hid his other behaviors in personal journals, co-directed videotapes of violent scenes, and violent creative writing stories.

Dylan Klebold's personal factors included his intellectual and creative giftedness in writing and designing lightshows, and in building computers. His emotional characteristics involved a diagnosis of depression. His environment was nearly identical to Eric Harris's environment with two exceptions: Dylan's family did not move around throughout his life; and Dylan participated in a gifted program from third grade through sixth grade that was steeped with unhealthy competition, bullying, and taunting. Dylan became more introverted during this time. His academic behaviors contrasted with Eric: Dylan was known for not trying very hard in his academics. Work completion had

become an issue in later years of high school. He hid his violent proclivities and his use of alcohol and cigarettes well. His frustrations were expressed in journals.

T.J. Solomon displayed characteristics associated with creativity, but were not substantiated with high levels of intelligence in the writings I analyzed. His personal factors included the ability to write lyrically as a mode of expression; this was indicative of musical intelligence. His emotional characteristics consisted of the formal diagnoses of AD/HD by a psychologist prior to the shootings, and with major depression as diagnosed by two other psychologists after the shootings. He tended to be introverted in regards to showing emotion and in obtaining friendships. He rejected phone calls from girls, and neglected to invite friends over to his home. In his familial environment, T.J. was not given control of his interests or pastimes, nor was he allowed to take his medication on his own. His chosen form of expression was musical combined with verbal intelligences, and these were taken away from him in the home environment. In addition, it appeared as though his mother took control of his medication, and casted a shadow of doubt in his abilities when she searched his room periodically, threw away the lyrics to songs he had printed off, and allowed his stepfather to spank T.J. even at the age of fifteen. When a series of phone calls from girls began, she lectured T.J. for two hours on the implications of sex before marriage. In school, T.J. considered himself to be a loner, although there was evidence of friendships. The academic environment was not described as thoroughly as in other case studies; however, it was evident that there were cliques who held labels such as "rednecks," "goths," and "jocks." On T.J.'s backpack that housed some firearms on the day of his rampage, there was the embellishment, "Redneck." He held his



frustrations internally, and in poetic verse through rap lyrics, and through journals. His subsequent actions were mild in comparison to the other boys studied in this analysis. T.J. skipped school once and returned home quite late that evening. He also acquired cigarettes, and hid them until his sister found them in his pocket. However, in his final actions studied in his analysis, he ultimately chose to get help through violence. Interestingly, he was a trained marksman who was reported as being a better hunting shot than his stepfather, yet his case was the only one without deaths.

To summarize, three of the four boys demonstrated indications of giftedness in the intellectual realm. Kip Kinkel was part of the Talented and Gifted Program at his school for his high academic achievements in math and science; however, he also held a diagnosis of having learning disabilities. Math is termed as mathematical/logical intelligence, and science is termed as naturalistic intelligence (Gardner, 1993, 1998). I found negligible indications of creativity in his manipulative actions – not enough to state a diagnosis of creative giftedness. In addition, he was diagnosed by a psychologist as having emotional issues, including schizophrenia and depression. I found inconclusive findings on whether or not Kip was a student who demonstrated the creatively gifted-depression connection as discussed in the literature review in chapter two; however, there were indications of the connection between gifted and depression.

Eric Harris demonstrated high levels of intellectual and creative giftedness in his writings and rampage as outlined in the categorical analysis. His intellectual strengths appeared to be multiple, yet his thinking process demonstrated throughout his journals was of a naturalist and mathematic/logical nature. He excelled in all of his classes, yet his



chosen classes for his junior/senior years consisted of philosophy (abstract thinking and belief systems that could pertain to existential intelligence), creative writing (verbal/linguistic intelligence combined with creativity), videography (creativity combined with leadership in directing, verbal/linguistic and body/kinesthetic intelligences), theater technology (combination of creativity and mathematical/logical intelligence), and psychology (intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences). It should be noted that enrolling in these classes does not lead a person to giftedness in that realm; however, it appears to be indicative of his choice for combining creativity into all his choices in education. In addition, he was formally diagnosed by a psychologist as having anger issues combined with depression prior to the shootings. He therefore demonstrated evidence of a creatively and intellectually gifted-depression connection.

Dylan Klebold also demonstrated high levels of creative and intellectual giftedness in his writings, videotaped scenes, and his rampage as discussed in the categorical analysis. The choices he made in academic coursework were nearly identical to Eric Harris; however, Dylan was more involved in the theater with lights than Eric was. This demonstrated his stronger desire to have a creative outlet for his technological expertise (creativity combined with mathematical/logical intelligence). His writing clearly was evidence of creativity in his lengthy descriptions of scenes (visual-spatial intelligence combined with verbal/linguistic intelligence) and his innermost thoughts (intrapersonal intelligence). He was diagnosed in retrospect by psychologists as having depression. Therefore, his behaviors and emotional proclivities seemed to indicate the

same pattern as Eric Harris with evidence of a creatively and intellectually gifted-depression connection.

T.J. Solomon preferred to express himself through song lyrics he either wrote or that he printed off of the Internet. He failed to express himself in spoken words with his parents or with most others. The combination of these facts indicated his strong yet immature intrapersonal intelligence that was demonstrated through his immature behaviors at times. His lyrical writings also displayed his strong musical intelligence, as did his behaviors when he spent hours in the backyard listening to music. The creative, yet nonintellectual talent came through in the use of his verbal-linguistic intelligence in word choices. His avoidance of people was indicative of a low level of interpersonal intelligence, or simply a lack of confidence in his interpersonal skills. I cannot, at this time, state that his writings and behaviors combined with his emotional diagnosis demonstrated the same creatively gifted-depression connection as the other three boys in this study. I therefore leave this diagnosis as inconclusive.

In chapter five, I will further this discussion by synthesizing all the similarities, categories, themes, and the assertion. Implications of the study are discussed, and a list of recommendations for further study, policy changes, and educational interventions is provided.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS

#### A Comparison of the Categories & Themes to the Relevant Literature

In chapter four, several categories emerged from the perpetrators' writings. Multiple connections were linked together, with two outliers of significance. Each category and subsequent connection and disconnection was supported with qualitative evidence. A comparison of the meta-analysis of the scholarly research on rampage shootings, as written in chapter two, and the categories derived from the shooters' journals and creative writings, as reported in chapter four, yielded surprisingly similar findings. A review of the similarities found in the relevant literature analyzed in chapter two follows.

#### *Review of Similarities from Chapter 2*

*Similarity 1. Adolescent Males:* all of the shooters discussed in this study were boys in the middle to late stages of adolescence.

*Similarity 2. Intelligence:* all but one of the shooters indicated high intelligence. T.J. Solomon's I.Q. was not disclosed in the literature, nor were there any statements regarding high achievement in academics. All but one of the students were diagnosed as being gifted in at least one area, and all chose to write journal entries or musical lyrics to express their thoughts. Two of the boys were formally admitted into a gifted academic program during elementary school. T.J. was not part of a G/T program, nor was there



evidence that he participated in advanced coursework that would require him to use higher order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, or evaluation.

*Similarity 3. Environments:* all the boys lived in middle-to-upper class rural and/or suburban areas that had recently undergone rapid economic growth; they attended large high schools that had increased in multicultural population with this new economic growth. This was said to potentially have impact on feelings of instability in adolescent students. However, friends' behaviors, family relationships, and students' school performance tended to be more influential on the shooters' actions than the multicultural and socioeconomic factors. Included in this were the environments of each area: the schools were described by the students as being competitive, enlisting several cliques such as "Rebels," "Goths," "Trench Coat Mafia," "Jocks," "Preps," and "Rednecks." Yet, the community members and teachers were reported as either being ignorant or negligent of the violent atmosphere. In each case, all the shooters were bullied in some way, and all resorted to violence with their shooting sprees. The communities responded in each of these cases as though they were simply cases of troubled youth, and took no further action to build stronger ties with youths.

*Similarity 4. Abstract grievances:* all the shooters felt attacked by their school environment, rather than from a specific student or teacher.

*Similarity 5. Emotional Problems:* all of the shooters were diagnosed with some form of mental disorder such as depression, schizophrenia, AD/HD, or personality disorder. Kip was diagnosed as having learning disabilities in writing and reading; therefore, he qualified for special education programming in the educational

environment. To my knowledge, there were no interventions implemented for his emotional issues surrounding schizophrenia; this was not diagnosed until after his rampage.

Regarding Eric Harris, his anger issues and depression were diagnosed approximately one year prior to the shootings. His doctor prescribed Prozac for his symptoms, and his behaviors appeared to improve according to Brooks Brown (Brown & Merritt, 2002), a close friend of his. However, there was no evidence of an Individualized Education Plan for his emotional problems in the academic environment. His grades were not affected by his emotional issues either.

Dylan Klebold was not diagnosed with depression until after his death when psychologists read his journals and traced his footsteps from the year prior to the shootings. There were no reported interventions for his depression in the academic or familial environments.

T.J. Solomon was diagnosed in fourth grade as having AD/HD. His doctor prescribed Ritalin for his symptoms, and he continued this regimen through his shootings in the ninth grade. His mother controlled whether or not he would take the medicine or not, stating that she made sure he took it on school days, but not on weekends or during the summer. T.J., however, stated on videotape with a psychologist after his incarceration that he sometimes stole several pills or saved several over a period of days so that he could grind them up and sniff them for a mild high. To my knowledge, there were no academic accommodations for him even though his grades were typically quite low (Cs to Ds). Prior to the shootings, he was taken to the psychologist for an evaluation since

two students played a joke and accused him of stating he wanted to commit suicide. The psychologist at that time told T.J.'s mother he was quite sane and showed no indications of depression. After the shootings, however, T.J. was diagnosed by psychologists as having Major Depressive Disorder.' This diagnosis was during his incarceration; therefore, there was no evidence of academic or familial interventions or accommodations for his problems.

*Similarity 6. Marginalization:* all the boys involved in the shootings discussed in this study were described as "marginalized." Although they wrote or reported they were loners, they in fact had friends. These friends tended to be considered by peers to be marginalized as well. This begged the question of whether they *felt* connected to their friends in a meaningful way.

#### *Categories Derived from Meta-Analysis*

As stated previously, understanding the academic environment and its values was essential in trying to comprehend why the shooters chose to direct their attacks on school grounds. The academic environment consisted of several facets as well: the students, teachers, administration, curriculum, instructional methods, organizational structure, and the values of each. The following depicted the categories derived from the academic environment in the meta-analysis found in chapter two.

*Category 1. Gender Matters:* all of the shooters claimed they were called sexually charged names such as "gay," "faggot," and "homosexual," among other names regarding their size, such as "small." Two of the boys wrote or spoke of a girl's recent rejection; the



other two journaled about their difficulties in getting a girl to respond to them in a romantic way.

*Category 2. Devaluing of Intellectual and Creative Abilities and the Valuing of Athletics:* in every case, the shooters either referred to the “jocks” as being the enemy, although three also demonstrated nontraditional athleticism. Kip, however, was asked to try out for the football team. Their academic environments encouraged sports, and oftentimes overlooked the negative and bullying behaviors of the athletes toward the shooters. Additionally, two of the perpetrators were harassed for being part of the theatre programs.

*Category 3. Image and Competition:* Two of the boys attended a gifted program during elementary school, yet Kip was also diagnosed with a learning disability and was therefore considered less than the others in the program, and Dylan was placed into a program that allowed for political entrance. In both cases, competition flourished due to teacher or administrative support of the competitive structure of the hidden curriculum.

*Category 4. Power and Control:* All the boys desired control and order in some way. They either wanted to gain leadership control, or they wanted to give up what little control they had in the attempt to seek help.

#### *Categories Derived from Chapter 4*

The categories derived from my analysis of the shooters’ writings summarized in chapter four, were as follows:

*Category 1. Existential Thinking:* This was the natural precocity for questioning the meaning of life. The shooters in this analysis demonstrated several examples of

existential thinking, namely, the questions of why God let bad things happen to them, what will their futures hold, their contemplations of being on Earth, and more.

*Category 2. Control/Power:* All of the boys sought control of their lives through the gaining of power via intelligence, and subsequent violent actions. Some of the boys intended to release control by their shooting sprees in order to gain attention for their needs.

*Category 3. Image:* All boys were concerned with their image in various ways. All questioned what others would think of them after their shootings; some spent more energy on noting their significance in this world, while others concisely wrote of their dislike for other labeling them as “gay,” “redneck,” “homosexual,” and “small.”

*Category 4. Blame:* Although several of the boys accepted responsibility for their actions in writing at times, this typically was done to feed into their vision of improving their image (category three). Without exception, each boy wrote of the blame they placed on their peers, and on God for their circumstances.

*Category 5. Cognitive/Affective Thinking Problems:* All but one of the shooters included in the writing analysis stated the awareness they had of their own mental problems. Eric Harris denied his emotional problems, and seemed adamant about allowing his anger and passions to take over since he felt they were natural instincts.

*Category 6. Lacking Meaningful Connections:* All of the boys described their attitude toward others as careless. Each boy stated in his own way how negatively he viewed peers and society.

*Category 7. Meaningful Connections:* This category was associated only with T.J. Solomon when he warned others in his journals. He cautioned them to be “very careful,” and even told them approximately how many bombs he was planning to place around his high school. This demonstrated that he cared about others.

*Category 8. Creativity:* Although there were several instances where creative thinking was supported by their rich and descriptive writing, the diagnoses of high levels of creativity were inconclusive for two of the boys. However, all used creativity in many ways through their actions and writing: musical rhythm in poetry, creative maneuvering to avoid being caught, detailed drawings, and descriptive, elongated creative stories that created vivid imagery in the mind of the reader.

*Category 9. Intellectualization:* All but one of the boys offered examples of their ability to think deeply, legitimize their actions, and demonstrate intellectual superiority. Some demonstrated this through writing metacognitive thoughts in journals, and others demonstrated this through their attempts to logically think through their actions.

*Comparison of Categories Found in the Literature and Rampage Shooters' Writings*

All the shooters were adolescent males, most of whom demonstrated high levels of intelligence and creativity. They found themselves in competitive academic environments that valued a hierarchy of peer dominance. The hierarchy had multiple layers, namely: (1) through the allowance of physical and psychological bullying; (2) the valuing of athleticism over intellectualism and/or creativity; and (3) through social cliques that held labels, and were reinforced by adults through their indifference to it. The hatred and frustration toward the school was abstract in nature; it appeared to be an



overall hatred of the academic organization as a whole, which included the teachers, peers, and the hierarchy of dominance, in addition to the curriculum for some. Each of the shooters suffered from an emotional/behavioral problem which may have contributed to their marginalization, and subsequent violent actions, but that may have been instilled by the competitive and hierarchical environment in which they were found in combination to their existential and emotional proclivities associated with their high intellectual and/or creative abilities.

In the effort to connect the relevant literature with the categories derived from the meta-analysis in chapter two, and the categories derived from the analysis of the shooters' writings, the following connections and disconnections were derived:

*Connection 1. There appeared to be an interrelationship between the boys and the association between creative writers, giftedness, and depressive tendencies.* The connection between creative writers, giftedness, and depression appeared to be significant, however, the studies were few. In the cases of Kip Kinkel, Eric Harris, Dylan Klebold, and T.J. Solomon, there were several indicators of this correlation.

First, Kip Kinkel was reported as having a learning disability in writing and spelling, yet he excelled in math and science and was therefore admitted to the TAG program (Talented and Gifted). Although he did not creatively write much due to his disability, he wrote journals to express his thoughts. Additionally, when Kip and his friend were about to be caught throwing stones off the bridge on his snowboarding trip, Kip somehow managed to escape arrest on the bridge; he had made his way back to the motel alone. This demonstrated manipulative behaviors which are also indicative of

creative thinking. Kip also bragged of killing and committing strange and creative things with animals in the woods surrounding his house, yet he escaped being caught. I found evidence of reality mixed with fantasy, and creative wording in his journals.

In testimony and in scholarly reports, it was stated that Kip was severely depressed, and eventually was given the dual diagnoses of schizophrenia with depression. Therefore, he held several comorbidities: gifted, due to his I.Q. which was unreported, and achievements in math and science; learning disabilities in writing and spelling; and emotional/behavioral disorders, due to his deep depression and schizophrenia. At this time, I would not add a diagnosis of high creativity, although some of his actions indicated creative tendencies. These tendencies could also be characteristic of bright children who may not be considered “gifted” in the creative realm; more samples of Kip’s writings or drawings would need to be analyzed for further indications of creative gifts.

Eric Harris also demonstrated his creative and intellectual abilities through the courses he chose to take in Columbine High School, in his journals and creative writings, in his drawings, and in his actions. There were several indicators that led me to believe he resisted closure, sought to be original, and was fluent in coming up with ideas – all of these are traits associated with creativity. Evidence of this was in his planning for the Columbine massacre; he planned for over a year to commit this heinous act. His drawings were highly detailed. Eric’s creative stories were passionate, focused on survival, and engaged all the senses.

Eric was also diagnosed with anger issues prior to the Columbine attacks. He was placed on an anti-depressant, then switched medications after a few months. According to Brooks Brown (2002), Eric's behaviors changed for the better while on the medication, although Brooks was unaware of the influence of medication at that time. Interestingly, however, Eric continued his quest for destroying as many people he could at Columbine during the time he was being medicated.

Eric evaded being caught in his plans for the shootings at Columbine. He was highly creative in his ability to dissuade people from suspecting him of doing any wrong. Not only did this employ higher levels of intelligence, it also demonstrated high levels of creativity.

In addition, Eric experimented with making all types of bombs with Dylan. He used the scientific method to perfect the art of bomb-making with unique items such as dry ice, and wrote notes on what worked, what did not work.

Dylan also demonstrated high levels of creativity in his writing. His stories engaged most of the senses through verse. His rich descriptions of scenes created a vivid visual image in the mind of the reader, and tapped into his own intuition. His deeply descriptive sentences resisted closure, illuminated originality, and demonstrated word fluency.

In Dylan's journal excerpts, however, his depressive tendencies surfaced. He wrote of seeking peace and happiness, and apologized for his upcoming violent actions. In addition, he said goodbye to whomever would read the journals after his death. He



declared in one of his journals that he did not want to be a jock; he just wanted to have the happiness they seemed to have (Klebold, 1999).

Both Eric and Dylan thrived on being original in the way they dressed, and in creating the violent videos of their "missions." These were also indicative of reality mixed with fantasy. Both boys clearly integrated responsibility with irresponsibility, intelligence integrated with naivety, and integrated playfulness with discipline. They were extroverted when writing and making their videos, yet displayed introversion toward others in public settings. Eric especially displayed rebelliousness with conservative tendencies, while Dylan displayed rebelliousness without much evidence of seeking structure

In summary, Eric was dually diagnosed with being gifted intellectually and academically in creative writing, math, and science; and with emotional/behavioral disorders of depression and anger (there were nuances toward him being diagnosed with antisocial personality disorder and/or conduct disorder as well). I would add to these diagnoses that Eric was a highly creative individual who utilized creativity in his actions and academic writing.

Dylan was also dually diagnosed with being gifted intellectually and academically in creative writing, with the emotional disorder of depression. He employed creativity in his daily work in school and in theatre. He sought outlets for his creativity in writing lightshows for various play productions, and boasted on his resume of building computers. Again, I would add creativity to his diagnoses.

With regard to T.J. Solomon, his writings did not indicate intellectual giftedness; however, they demonstrated creativity in musical and poetic rhythm. T.J. wrote mainly through foul language to express his frustrations and anger. He was introverted toward all people, but claimed he found a way to express himself through writing lyrics to songs. His extroversion, then, was demonstrated abstractly through musical lyrics.

Additionally, T.J. was very passionate about writing lyrics, and about reading and printing lyrics to his favorite songs off the Internet. When interviewed by the psychologist, T.J. made it clear that he was seeking the words to the songs from his favorite artists, not the melodies behind them. He told of his desire to seek ways to express himself. Regarding the indicators of creativity, T.J. displayed naivety, but did not appear to display high intelligence in his work or actions during the shootings. He appeared to emit humility in his actions, but did not demonstrate pride in self.

T.J. was formally diagnosed with major depression, an emotional disorder, as well as AD/HD, a neurological behavioral disorder. There were nuances of schizoid personality disorder, but I was unable to verify this with the psychologist reports; therefore, I am unable to state this was an actual diagnosis. I would add that T.J. had a strength in musical intelligence, however, I could not state there were indications of giftedness in this area without analyzing more of his writing.

*Connection 2. Self-efficacy theory could be associated with the behaviors of the shooters.* The connections were numerous between self-efficacy theory, as described by Bandura (1994, 1986), and the four shooters in this study. Each adolescent boy had some form of diagnosis that affected the prefrontal cortex, the planning and interpreting center

of their brains; and the limbic system, the emotional center of their brains. Interestingly, the boys who caused the most damage to people were the ones who displayed higher intellectualization in their journals and actions: Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold. It is possible that Kip Kinkel's writing disability interfered with his ability to intellectualize his actions in writing even though his actions equated to the death of his parents and two classmates.

All four boys were attempting to solve a problem in some way by their shooting sprees. T.J. Solomon sought help for himself, and chose to gain the attention of others by expressing his need through violence. Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold sought to destroy through violence those who bullied and supported the bullying by negligence. Kip Kinkel attempted to solve the problem of embarrassing his parents by killing them; and attempted to solve his image problem at school by opening fire on the student body, and ultimately to have others open fire on him (suicide by cop), as he stated in his audiotaped confession. All of these boys displayed skewed logic. Again, this begged the question of which part of the neurological development of self-efficacy was affected.

As described by Bandura (1994, 1986), and Pajares (2002), those with higher self-efficacy were those who had the ability to persevere in the face of adversity; those with lower self-efficacy were described as those who tended to believe they had some sort of deficiency and were unable to learn how to overcome or solve a problem. In synthesizing this, it was evident that Eric and Dylan *intended* to harm others, and felt they had the ability to do so. In fact, there were notes of their experimentation with the bomb-making materials, how to improve them, and how they were going to use them in their rampage. I



believe they had a strong sense of self-efficacy with their intellectual and violent capabilities; however, when I analyzed their writings, their social-emotional self-efficacy was lacking.

Evidence of social-emotional and cognitive self-efficacy was lacking with Kip and T.J. as well. They claimed their heads did not work right; they stated that either no one liked them, or they thought they did not have the ability to make friends. In combination, this was supportive of the argument that their emotional proclivities may have affected their logical thinking; that the strength of the neurochemical stimulation from limbic system may have been unable to balance out with the neurochemicals from the prefrontal cortex.

*Connection 3. Control/Power were definitive issues with all four adolescent boys in their shootings and in their writings.* In both analyses (chapter 2 and 4), control and power were significant issues for all four of the boys. Kip Kinkel “could not allow” his parents to go through the embarrassment of his being arrested at school for bringing in a gun. His solution to this problem was to kill his parents even though he loved them, then to walk into his school the next day to open fire on the student body.

Eric intended to hurt others, and desired to give pain in order to gain control. However, his writings indicated irony in a few areas: (1) as his journals evolved over time, he progressively saw himself becoming more like God – all powerful – yet, he admitted his preference for natural selection which he logically stated would rid the world of people quicker than a thinking society; (2) he also wished people would think about the lyrics in songs rather than just enjoy the melody, and he expressed his

frustration with people for not taking advantage of their gifts of thinking given to them at birth, yet he hated it when others used their thought processes to arrest him and place him on the diversion program when he felt superior to them; (3) he admitted he was racist against several races, yet when he stated his escape plan for after the shootings, he claimed he and Dylan would flee to another country that was inhabited with the races he claimed to hate; (4) he also stated he rejected the morals of his parents and society, yet his journals also stated he wanted to become God where all others would “officially” be beneath him.

Dylan claimed in his journal that he did not want to be a jock, but he wanted to have the happiness they had. He wanted to control his situation by finding happiness through taking his own life.

T.J. was in a unique position when compared to the three other boys in this study. He was part of a family that seemed to disallow him to have any control of friends, time spent with others, taking his medication, or his free time. In the courtroom testimony, his stepfather admitted he still spanked T.J. at the age of 15. When they claimed they had discussions with T.J. over concerns with his behavior, they were literally described as lectures rather than discussions, and that they refused to consider T.J.’s perspective on things. T.J. was not allowed to go out with his friends without a parent along. Moreover, he was trained to get up each morning, fetch the newspaper, and be given his medication by his mother before going to school. In a taped interview with a psychologist, T.J. admitted to trying to take some form of control by stealing several Ritalin pills,

pulverizing them, then snorting them for a mild high. Additionally, he gave up control when he decided at last minute to pursue his fantasy of opening fire on the school.

*Connection 4. The boys lacked positive meaningful connections with others, and demonstrated egocentric thinking.* Apparent in their journals and taped interviews, these boys expressed a lack of meaningful connections with their peers. Kip Kinkel stated that he did not care as much about his friends as he did himself, and his egocentrism was evident when he abandoned his friend at the bridge on their snowboarding trip. In addition, he claimed in his journal that he wanted to kill without consequence.

Eric expressed a significant amount of hatred toward others. He fantasized about violently and painfully killing others while enjoying the sensations on his skin. He further claimed he did not care about laws, that they were society's way of diminishing natural human abilities.

Dylan expressed his concern for his family when he apologized to them in his journal; however, he stated his frustration and lack of ability to connect with the opposite sex. He further declared his jealousy of the jocks for having happiness when he went without it.

*Connection 5. Improving their image appeared to be a powerful motivating factor for all the boys.* Image was a recurring category throughout this meta-analysis. Densely connected to the categories *power/control*, *self-efficacy theory*, and *lacking meaningful connections*, image was determined to be a motivating factor in their writings.

As stated in the scholarly research, all the shooters were tired and infuriated by being called "gay," "faggot," and "small." The same held true for the four boys studied in



this analysis. Kip was small for his age, and had atypical interests. Eric and Dylan participated in creative writing courses, philosophy and psychology courses, and were very active in the technical aspects of theatre; these interests left them susceptible for taunting and bullying since they were not accepted as being “manly” in their school environments. In addition, Dylan and Eric were not involved in athletics, and Eric had a mild chest deformity in combination with his small build for his age. T.J. did not demonstrate much interest in romantic relationships with girls; he even rejected their phone calls at home. There were innuendos of a girl breaking things off with him shortly before his shootings, but they were not verified.

T.J. skipped school one day to be with some friends, yet he refused to invite anyone over to his house during the entire stay in Conyers, Georgia. This begged the question of whether he was embarrassed of his family since they would not let him go anywhere without a parent along, nor would they allow him to watch television, go online, or print off lyrics to his favorite songs due to the graphic and foul language. They also admitted to searching his room periodically, which would indicate their distrust in him.

*Disconnection 1. T.J. evidenced his care for others through emphasized warnings to others who would read his journal. This was an indicator that he had a meaningful connection to others even though he chose not to accept phone calls from girls or invite friends over to his home. T.J. Solomon’s journal and confession held the only evidence of making meaningful connections in written or video-/audiotaped format. Although there were connections between this and the research stating the need for gifted adolescents to*

have meaningful relationships, the evidence of these associations was lacking for the other three boys. He repeatedly warned others through his writings of what he was about to do. He would write things such as,

I'm still not sure if bombing the school is such a good idea, so I'll at least give you an idea of what's going on. If the cops have been doing their jobs correctly, you would have found the sheets I've printed out with the bomb procedures on it... Be very careful. The drop of a safety-pin could set at least six off. (I've tried that). (Kinkel, 1998)

Interestingly, while there was evidence of his making meaningful connections to others through his repeated written warnings, this was the only case studied where there were no deaths.

In response to the argument that the other boys actually warned others in various ways, most of those warnings were stated in spoken word to others. Eric Harris, for example, reportedly warned Brooks Brown in the parking lot of Columbine High School by telling him to leave the area. He did not offer an explanation as to why, but Brooks intuitively heeded his warning and left the area. This was certainly an indication of a meaningful connection between the two, yet this was not obvious in Eric's writings. In fact, his writings indicated repeatedly the opposite was true.

*Disconnection 2. The evidence of existential precocity with all four of the boys included in the analysis in chapter four was glowing, although no evidence of it was reported in the scholarly reports. In contrast to all the scholarly research done on the rampage shootings, existential precocity was radiantly eminent in all of the boys'*



journals, creative stories, and in the videotaped and written confessions. However, a connection existed between the research on gifted children's tendencies for existential precociousness and the shooters' words and actions.

All of the boys studied in this analysis either blamed God, or referred to God in a significant way. Unlike the typical profanity included in many of their journals and lyrics, a significant reference indicated to me that they were considering the afterlife, God's power, or their ability or desire to be God. Without exception, this was demonstrated in each case.

#### *In Summary*

Several connections were evident between the meta-analysis in chapter two, and the analysis in chapter four. They included potential connections toward the links between creativity, giftedness, and emotional problems. Issues of power and control that were linked to the shooters' perception of their image were supported by several sources. These connections could be linked to self-efficacy issues that could integrate the shooters' emotional/behavioral problems. Additionally, disconnections included that existential precocity was evident in all of the shooters' writings, yet were not discussed in the scholarly research. Finally, the only case that held evidence of the shooter making meaningful connections with people was the only case in which no deaths were reported.

The categories derived from the meta-analysis in chapter two, and the subsequent analysis in chapter four, were evidence that these four boys were seeking to improve their image within the boundaries of the school environment. They chose to solve their social and emotional problems through violence when they could not see another way.



## Implications

What good can come out of a study that sought out whether there were indications of intellectual and/or creative giftedness and emotional/behavioral issues in the rampage shooters? Would this prove anything, or lead us to more answers?

In my estimation, this study served as the building of a foundation off of which to conduct future studies. In no way could the results of this study establish definitive grounds to make a generalization that all rampage shooters were intellectually and/or creatively gifted with emotional/behavioral problems. It seems logical, however, to assume that all rampage shooters had emotional/behavioral problems. The question still exists whether the rest of them were gifted in any way that could or should be addressed in the schools.

If there were indications of the connection between giftedness and rampage shootings, in combination with the evidence of self-efficacy theory, I believe this would serve as grounds for future studies on G/T children's emotional and social development in and through the academic environment. These studies, no doubt, would integrate chapters on historical and current practices in the identification, instructional, curricular, and counseling for G/T children.

In the historical realm, deeper studies of the shooters' familial and academic environments where we seek out information associated with power/control and existential values and practices may illuminate where problems or gaps may have occurred. These, in turn, could affect future practices in educational policy, such as mandating in every state academic and social-emotional services for G/T children. This

could take the form of service learning projects, individualized research and curricular programming, and differentiated instruction to ensure enriched curriculum on a daily basis. In addition, studies such as these could affect counseling practices for future career planning, so that G/T children could see a hopeful future that would value and use their abilities. Also, these studies could contribute to parental understanding of their G/T children so they could provide nurturing environments that would promote and support the growth of their children's gifts. To add another facet to this, these studies could provide valuable information to law enforcement, social workers, and therapists involved with the aftermath of the shootings. They would provide information for designing better intervention programs for more effective rehabilitation of those who choose to commit violent acts.

Moreover, research in this realm could also contribute, at the very least, to a sort of profile for rampage shooters. This is *not* to say that I believe all G/T children who display creative and/or intellectual strengths, yet also appear introverted and depressed, may lead to a rampage shooting. To say this would not only be careless, but also false. However, taking a more detailed look into the use of their multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1993, 1998, 1999) through their violent actions, and integrating this with their emotional proclivities, we could gain enormous ground on understanding why these events transpired. In studying how the shooters used their gifts through expression in word and act, we can begin to develop an inkling of understanding why.

Previous studies (Newman et al, 2003; NRCIMNA, 2002; Urso Spina, 2000) have contended that there still seems to be no definitive profile, nor is there an agreed upon

answer to the question of why the shooters committed these acts. It is obvious to me that these studies neglected a key piece to understanding the boys' actions: their intellectual/creative strengths and interests. In fact, it was very surprising to me that no details were explicated in their published studies regarding their strengths or interests.

Finally, the results I found most surprising were not that the adolescents featured in this study were contemplating such existential quandaries as was evident in their writings; rather, it was the lack of reporting of these quandaries by the other studies that shocked and angered me. To be fair, the National Research Council Institute of Medicine of the National Academies (NRCIMNA, 2003) wrote three sentences about the spiritual questioning of Andrew Wurst, the shooter involved in the rampage in Edinboro, Pennsylvania. They wrote,

The Wurst family is Catholic. Andrew attended religious classes but didn't go to church, explaining to Sadoff that he questioned the existence of God because of all the suffering in the world. He said he didn't believe in Satan either, noting that without God there can be no Satan. (p. 75)

My frustrations only begin with the unanswered question as to why any further inquiry was not conducted or reported to the public. If this category emerged so strongly in combination with power/control, which infused their way into the themes and the assertion for this study, why was it that none of the other studies delved further into this to seek out reasons for the shootings?



This particular study will not serve to answer or diminish my frustrations with the aforementioned question. It will, however, bring to the foreground an implication of it: a study into the existential quandaries of violent adolescents and G/T adolescents.

In sum, the implications for this study are future studies that can blossom through the academic, educational policy, familial, counseling, religious, social work, and law enforcement realms. With the implications in mind, the following recommendations surfaced.

### Recommendations

After analyzing the shooters' journals, and linking the derived categories and themes to the relevant research in the literature, several recommendations surfaced.

*Recommendation 1. I believe that the study of school violence should, at the very least, involve the consideration of the students' abilities, interests, and strengths.* All of the perpetrators who fell under the category of "adolescent school rampage shooters" met definitive criteria: they were current or former students of the school where the shooting occurred; and their grievances were abstract in nature rather than a targeted attack on specific individuals.

The question of why they chose to complete their shooting spree at school should raise other questions such as: (1) what are the dynamics of the school environment? (2) what is expected of students in the school environment? (3) how did the shooters fulfill the expectations of the academic environment? (4) how did their peers fulfill the expectations? (5) how did the shooters and their peers handle each others' fulfillment of

expectations? (6) did this affect the social structure in the school, or did the social structure in the school impact the academic performances?

In contemplating these quandaries, investigators naturally would be led to the authentic artifacts requested by the school, namely, assignments. Additionally, it would lead to an investigation of their chosen work, i.e., their desire to journal their thoughts, their love of hunting, their interests in poetry and music, their search for meaning, and more. Considering the talents and skills of students is of utmost importance when educating them. When teachers and parents understand the interests and abilities of the students, curriculum and instruction can be geared for them to learn how to use their skills in healthy ways. Students also feel acknowledged for their abilities, and feel of value; therefore, the development of self-efficacy could continue to grow rather than be squelched.

*Recommendation 2. In recognition of the literature on gifted education that illuminates the necessity for appropriate social-emotional support for gifted students, especially those with nontraditional talents, I recommend that all K-12 educational environments provide appropriate programming for gifted students. This would entail faculty receiving continuing staff development on the academic and social-emotional needs of gifted students, all school counselors receiving specialized training in gifted social-emotional needs, and providing creative outlets and problem-solving opportunities that allow these children to utilize their abilities in healthful ways, and exercise complex thinking skills. I especially emphasize the importance of supplying cognitive curriculum to exercise their emotional intelligence in a less risky format at the adolescent stage.*

*Recommendation 3. Considering the existential precocity of the shooters and the lack of its reporting in previous research, I recommend the two following ideas: (1) that those who display interests in learning more deeply about existential quandaries be provided with outlets for this interest; and (2) that further research be conducted in the gifted child's quest for existential understanding.* Controversial in nature, conversations need to be held regarding existential thinking, its involvement with intelligence, and its potential for being an intelligence all to itself as suggested by Gardner (1999). In addition, discussion should be held regarding the potential for offering optional classes where outlets for this type of thinking could be provided in healthful ways. If this is not deemed possible in the academic environment, then ongoing education should be held for those involved with gifted children, i.e., parents and teachers, so that this precocity is not squelched; rather, it can be guided in a nurturing format to bring these children to a deeper level of understanding of themselves and of others.

*Recommendation 4. I recommend that future studies be conducted on how the superhighway between the prefrontal cortex (thinking system) and the limbic system (emotional system) is exercised in the academic environment in gifted and creative children; and I suggest further research on how this superhighway functions in the minds of adolescents who display emotional/behavioral problems through violent actions.*

Delving further into how much the academic environment contributes to, neglects, or takes away from the development of this dense and important structure in the brain could serve to complement existing curriculum and instruction, in addition to providing parents



with a window of opportunity to create deeper, more meaningful bonds with their precocious children.

*Recommendation 5. I recommend that this new exposure to the thoughts of the violent shooters be made available to law enforcement, counselors, social workers, and all who are involved with these situations.* In the effort to understand why violent offenders display violent actions, and how to work with them in a more productive mode, educating those involved with the legal realm may contribute to the creation of better programming, more effective sentencing options, and a higher rate of rehabilitation.

*Recommendation 6. I recommend that similar studies be conducted on other rampage shootings to establish whether there are patterns of giftedness in the intellectual and/or creative realms combined with other emotional/behavioral problems.* These studies should continue to further define the usage of their multiple intelligences and creativity since some patterns of giftedness surfaced in combination with inconclusive findings for T.J. Solomon. If there is no recurring pattern of giftedness, a pattern may emerge in how each used their intelligence strengths in thinking styles and actions since all people are said to have each of the intelligences outlined by Gardner (1993, 1998, 1999).

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### Creativity Checklist

- \_\_\_\_\_ Creative people have a great deal of physical energy but they're often quiet and at rest.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Creative people tend to be smart yet naïve at the same time: immaturity combined with deepest insights; convergent thinking (rational problem solving to one correct answer); divergent thinking (no agreed-upon solution – involves fluency, flexibility, and originality).
- \_\_\_\_\_ Creative people combine playfulness and discipline, or responsibility and irresponsibility.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Creative people alternate between imagination and fantasy, and a rooted sense of reality.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Creative people tend to be both extroverted and introverted, and may demonstrate these simultaneously.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Creative people are humble and proud at the same time.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Creative people, to an extent, escape gender role stereotyping.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Creative people are both rebellious and conservative.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Most creative people are very passionate about their work, yet they can be extremely objective about it as well.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Creative people's openness and sensitivity often expose them to pain and suffering, yet also to a great deal of enjoyment.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Creative people have the ability to enjoy the process of creation for its own sake.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Creative people feel a sense of loss and emptiness when they cannot work.



## APPENDIX B

### Multiple Intelligences Checklist

\_\_\_\_\_ Verbal/Linguistic Intelligence: The capacity to use language to express what's on your mind and to understand the language of other people; may have well-developed verbal skills and a sensitivity to the sounds, meanings, and rhythms of words in either/both written and spoken words in the form(s) of essays, jokes, speeches/debates, informal conversations.

\_\_\_\_\_ Existential Intelligence: To exhibit the proclivity to pose and ponder questions about the meaning of life, death, and ultimate realities. This includes the ponderings of hope, love, joy, peace, and of the infinite.

\_\_\_\_\_ Interpersonal Intelligence: The ability to understand other people, their actions, their perspectives, their feelings; uses person-to-person relations such as communication, teamwork, and collaboration.

\_\_\_\_\_ Intrapersonal Intelligence: Having an understanding of yourself, of knowing who you are, what you are able to do; feeling confident in self in knowing what to avoid/gravitate toward; understanding of knowing who to go to for help when necessary due to ability for introspection, self-reflection.

\_\_\_\_\_ Naturalist Intelligence: The ability to discriminate among living things as well as sensitivity to other features of the natural world; may be concerned with the environment; may employ the scientific process with experimentation; recognizes patterns and distinctions in the natural world.

\_\_\_\_\_ Body/Kinesthetic Intelligence: The capacity to use your whole body or parts of

your body to solve a problem, make something, or put on a production; likes to learn by doing; may need to move around while learning.

\_\_\_\_\_ Musical Intelligence: The capacity to think in music, to be able to hear patterns, recognize them, and potentially manipulate them; the ability to appreciate and produce rhythms, pitch, and timber; may think in music, and learn through sounds, rhythms, tones, beats, and music produced by others or present in the environment.

\_\_\_\_\_ Visual/Spatial Intelligence: The ability to present the spatial world in your mind; the use of sight and imagination in visualizing an object or event; includes making mental images.

\_\_\_\_\_ Mathematical/Logical Intelligence: The ability to understand the underlying principles of a causal system as a scientist or mathematician does; the ability to think conceptually and abstractly, and the capacity to discern logical or numerical patterns; may use numbers, logic, scientific reasoning, and calculating to solve problems and challenges.

All of the above criteria were derived from the research by Howard Gardner (1993, 1998, 1999), and were supported by the following websites retrieved on July 16, 2008:

<http://www.chariho.k12.ri.us/curriculum/MISmart/MImapDef.HTM> and

<http://lth3.k12.il.us/rhampton/mi/MIIDENTIFIED.htm>

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